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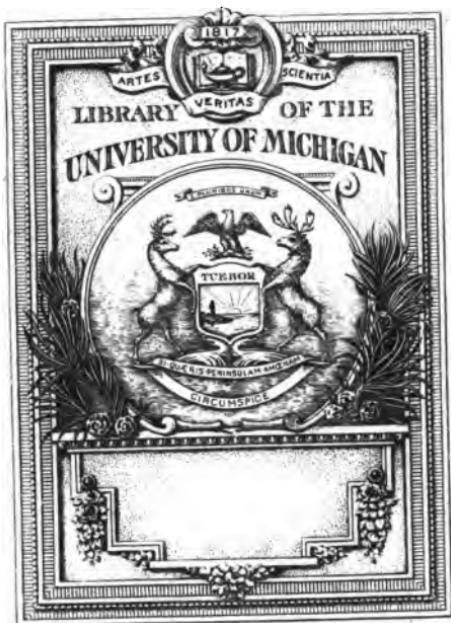
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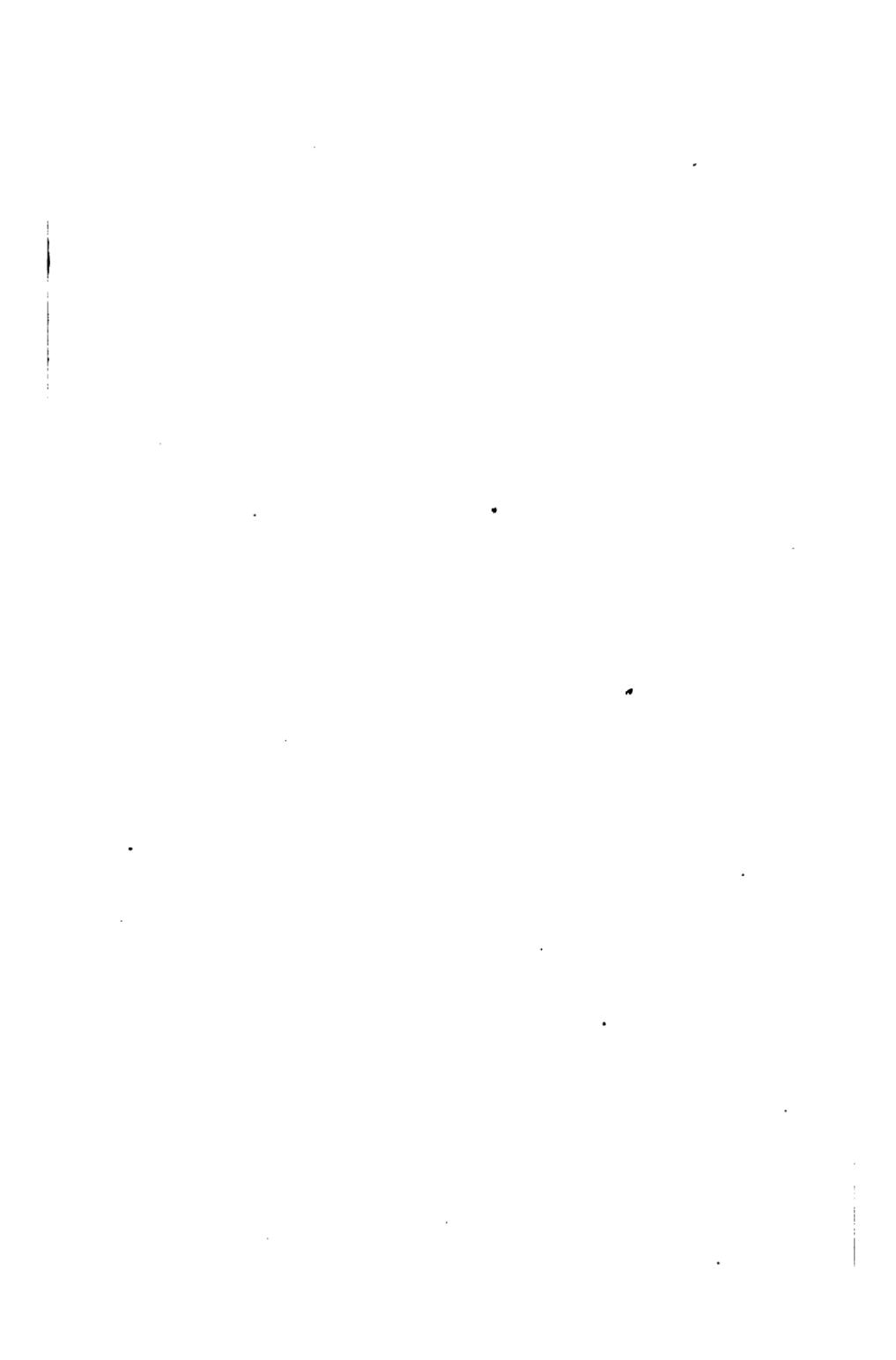


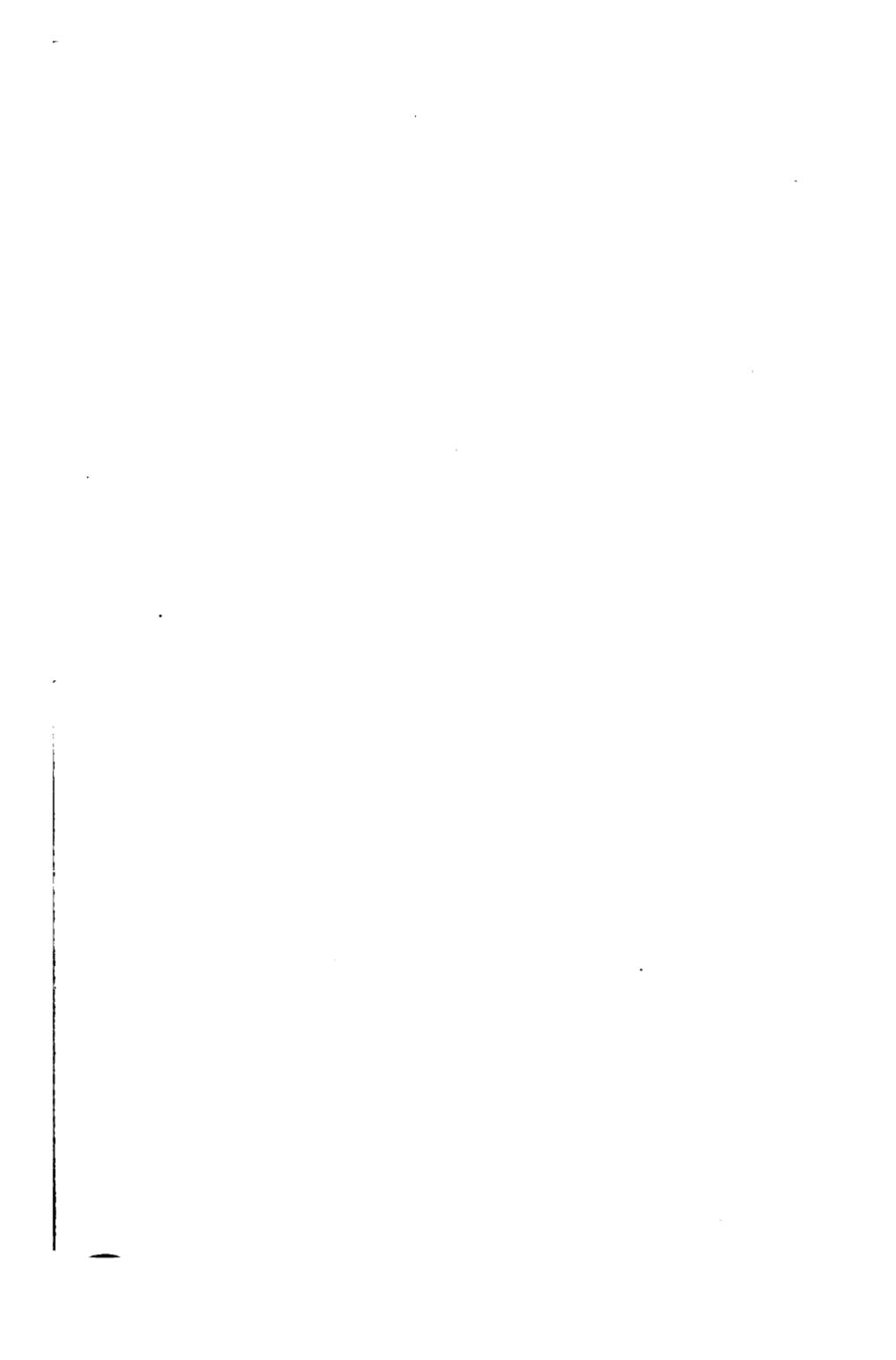
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# THE THREE COMRADES

By GUSTAV FRENSSEN

Author of "Jörn Uhl," "Holyland," etc.

Translated from the German

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**BOOK I.**

**172522**



# THE THREE COMRADES

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## CHAPTER I.

THEY ride out of the avenue of the Strandigerhof — “The Three Comrades.” They ride to the dyke, intending to look out from its summit over the North Sea, and discover if the enemies’ ships are in sight. For the Fatherland is making war. It is three days after Gravelotte.

There are no soldiers visible either on the land or on the shore; they have all gone to France. So the boys of Holstein must come to the fore. They call themselves “The Three Comrades.” They are all of the same age — ten years. In front and together ride the two cousins, the Strandigers. The one on the right is Andrees Strandiger, the only child of the Strandigerhof. He is the son of that Strandiger who was pursued by the tide in the Watt,<sup>1</sup> overtaken and surrounded. Even now, after nearly thirty years, whenever the west wind drives over the dyke, they speak of his fate with pity in the houses and manors of the March; for this Strandiger was a strong, capable man.

On his left rides Franz Strandiger. He is on a visit to the Strandigerhof. His father, a lieutenant in the artillery of the Ninth Army Corps, has been lying for two days in the first house of Verneville, on the de la Cusse side, shot through the lungs, and a dying man. The boy does not know it as yet; he will not learn it till some weeks later when he goes home

<sup>1</sup> Watt — a local name in North Germany: tidal ground uncovered at the ebb.

to his mother. He does not suspect that his life has taken a turn on to a hard rough road; now his mother and her family, who live in Berlin, will manage his education, and they are a harsh race. He has placed his right hand lightly on his side as he has seen his father ride, and he rides the best of the three.

The child from the Strandigerhof is their commander; he is the quietest and the cleverest.

"Gallop," commands Andrees, and the horses gallop immediately. The dyke rises before them.

But the third is hanging back. The third is Heim Heiderieter, the boy from the Heidehof. He has a round head with a child's round cheeks and curly fair hair. His eyes are blue, deep and loyal. In appearance and movement he is shy and constrained, but his teacher and pastor both say he has a clear head, and so he has been learning Latin since Easter. They have given him the worst horse — Dickkopf, who is seventeen years old and trots heavily.

The others have already halted on the summit of the dyke; they look through their hands, which they hold before their eyes like telescopes, over the green "foreland" and the wide low sands above which the sun is resting.

"The horizon seems quiet," said Andrees.

Franz put his hand to his cap. "At your command, colonel. I can see, south of Büsen, in the Norderpiep, three vessels which are not fishing boats."

The colonel "telescoped" with his hands towards the northwest. In the far, far distance there were three or four black points, which seemed as if they were worked into the silver glittering girdle of the sea.

"We must wait here," he said; "we cannot see yet what kind of vessels they are."

"Shall I send back Private Heiderieter to fire the alarm gun?"

Andrees turned and looked back at Heim, who was just coming up and appeared not to have heard. He thought that suited best his dignity as colonel.

The adjutant moved restlessly on his brown horse, his face grew angry and his eyes glittered, but he controlled himself and said brusquely —

"Will you permit me, colonel, to ride to the edge of the channel so that I can see the vessels better?"

The colonel nodded haughtily. Franz Strandiger rode obliquely down the dyke, and then in a quick gallop along the soft road, the so-called Sandway, which goes straight into the Watt. He sat firmly and securely, looking as if he were bound to his horse with his brown belt. He rode as far as the bank of the Priel; there he halted for awhile and looked over towards Büsen; then he galloped on, keeping close to the channel. In the sunlight they could see plainly how the hoofs of his horse struck up the grey sand and splashing water. Meanwhile, Andrees, with a discontented expression, halted on the top of the dyke. He was not pleased that his cousin should have been the first to see the ships on the horizon, and he was afraid the adjutant would overstrain his horse on the soft shore of the Watt. He turned towards Heim and said angrily —

“You look so queer, Heiderieter. You will never make a good figure in the saddle. You look like a boy.”

Private Heiderieter turned crimson; his trousers, of stiff English leather, had got dragged up, and he tried to pull them down to his rough shoes.

The colonel looked again over the Watt, and the private began to dream in his own way. He forgot the playing at war and he forgot the colonel, and in his dream he stumbled out of his part and said suddenly in his clear child’s voice —

“Andrees, Franz may easily get in the quicksand. It’s deep there, I tell you.”

Then Andrees Strandiger too forgot his rank and position, and said in vexation —

“He’s always doing something strange. He is a mad fellow, and there’s no sense in what he does. I can’t bear him.”

“Nor I. Yesterday, when we rode over the dyke, he kicked Dickkopf so dreadfully hard with the toe of his boot that he shied sharply. There — do you see, Andrees? Do you see? He is right in the quicksand!”

“Good Heavens!” said Andrees, “that’s a bad business. But now, quick!”

He rode down the dyke and galloped along the road to the Watt. Heim followed as quickly as he could. They had to ride a long time, nearly a quarter of an hour. By then the horse had slipped on the smooth, treacherous ground on the sloping margin of the channel, and lay on its side. The rider, whose blue suit was quite grey with mud, knelt beside his horse

as it lay down, and tore out with his hands the loose earth which had worked into the fore hoofs; he turned towards his companions as they approached, stood up and reported, "Fallen down with my horse."

"That's a poor story," said Andrees. "Why did you ride so close to the Priel? If you do anything as stupid again I will reduce you to the ranks."

The minute he was blamed quick anger flashed from the boy's eyes. He dug in the mud with his hands, and called out, with a fierce movement —

"Don't come too near me! I tell you what — you are fine friends! You stand there on the dyke and gape in the air. King Wilhelm ought to see that." Anger overcame him, and he raised his hand, filled with the loose mud as it was.

"Ride back, Heiderieter, you idiot! I can't bear to look at you. You look such a fool on that stiff-legged beast. My father shall whip you, you idle fellow."

Andrees looked angrily but silently on the prostrate horse and the rising tide which dashed against the hoofs.

"The horse must be got up," he said, in concern.

"You!" said Franz, scornfully. "You daren't come in this mud with your smooth hair and your polished boots. You think yourself somebody because your mother owns the Strandigerhof; but you yourself, you have nothing *here*," and he struck his hand on his breast.

"Franz, be sensible, and get your horse on his legs."

"I won't. And if I do, I won't ride with you. I will ride there — towards the island behind the Watt. I will ride to Flackelholm, quite alone, and look for the ships. As for you — go home to your mother."

"Heim, get down and help him."

"Let Heiderieter keep away, or something will happen. Such fools! You sha'n't come near me."

"I will go away," said Heim. "The water is coming already, and Dickkopf can't get his legs loose."

Andrees looked apprehensively first at the dyke and then at his furious adjutant.

"I'll tell you what. You shall be colonel next week. Now get hold of your horse."

Instantly Franz Strandiger bent down; he seized the hoofs which lay in the water and dragged them free, so that the grey

water spouted in his face. Then he tore with his young, boyish strength, pulled and tugged at the bit, thrust with his feet, encouraged the animal, and at last, groaning and snorting and throwing the mud about, it sprang upright.

From the place where he stood, Franz put his foot on the left knee of the animal and took a firm grip of the mane; he raised himself and swung himself up. Then he rode to the firm ground, and, putting his horse to the trot, turned round and said shortly and proudly —

“The battery falls to my command.”

His father had said the same two days ago at exactly three o'clock in the afternoon, when the sword had fallen from his captain's hand.

“To the school!”

They trotted over the dyke up the green field-path, between the low houses of Eschenwinkel, up the Sandway, and fastened their horses to the sunken barn door of the Heidehof. Then they went across to the school.

Three or four people were sitting in the schoolroom on the forms. They were talking over the news which the papers had brought during the last few days, and people had carried on from house to house; they looked at the great map of Germany which hung on the wall to the left of the master's desk, and while they talked their eyes often turned to one point on the map.

There stood the word “Metz.” Wonderful rumours had flown through the villages. They wished to speak, but it seemed as if something terrible closed their lips. Their eyes were fiery, and yet sad; they had raised their arms, but no one knew if it were in joy or anguish. A groan forced itself from their sternly compressed lips, their brows were deeply furrowed, their hair disordered; but they carried garlands of laurel on their shoulders.

As they flew by, the children, big and little, sprang up rejoicing; religious people folded their hands; those who had father, or husband, or son in the field, bowed themselves humbly. Only the worst shrugged their shoulders in indifference, but they were few.

By twos and threes the people came from the village and from Eschenwinkel, and discussed the news. Old and young

came, women and girls. They came in their working-clothes, burnt by the sun and warm from labour. The rye harvest on the Geest<sup>1</sup> was scarcely gathered, and they were bringing in the wheat from the March.<sup>2</sup>

Some one showed a post-card from the field. It was a true soldier's message. Jan Peters, the headman, had written it on his knapsack while he lay on his stomach.

"The Major asked the boys, "What will you do if the Turkos come? They scream like a thousand devils, and they have mad cats on their backs." They shouted, "We will cut them in the chops." That pleased the Major; he is all for cutting in the chops; but for my part I am for bacon and sausage as well. But there's nothing here except mouldy bread and Turkos."

"Do you understand? You must send him bacon."

"Do you think that I am so deaf? Haller has taken the parcel with him to-day."

Rohde of Eschenwinkel had taken cattle to the slaughter-house at Hamburg, and he spoke now in tones of great excitement, though he was usually a very quiet man.

"You should see how busy the stations are — as if a whole nation were emigrating!"

"Yes, they have to put the pressure on."

"Then, in forty-eight, there was no one to take the chief command — no vigour; that was the mistake."

"But old King Wilhelm!"

"Yes, I should say so."

"Do you know what people call the railway?"

"Well?"

"It is 'Bismarck's black horse,' they say."

"Yes; the soldiers and the horses, and the cannon — everything rides on it to the Rhine."

"Yes. Bismarck."

There was a pause.

"When I was coming back, there was a man in the train who knew Bismarck. He said, 'In sixty-six, when he wished to make peace, he struck on the table until they gave way to him.' He said, 'Bismarck is the biggest man in the whole army.'"

<sup>1</sup> Geest — Poor land reclaimed from the heath.

<sup>2</sup> March — Rich land reclaimed from the marsh.

"Yes, yes — in brains!"

"No; he meant in size."

"Yes, that may be."

"He knows all languages. He speaks French with the French, and Turkish with the Turkos. He knows Low German too; and he has a head."

"Yes; he has sense."

"He has *nous*."

"Yes; what does that mean — *nous*?"

"That means, he knows what he wants; and he can do what he wants."

"And he knows that he can do what he wants."

"Yes, yes; that is it."

The three comrades came down from the heath, across the road, and entered the schoolroom. The two Strandigers leaned boldly against the benches; Heim took a modest place by the wall. Just at that moment Schoolmaster Haller, tired and dusty, passed under the windows. His wife followed him. They were still young people.

Haller stood by his desk and tore the newspapers open. He read the news — brief, confused and hasty. But so much was evident: under the leadership of the king they had shut up in Metz a great army of the enemy's, and the men of Schleswig-Holstein had been there. There was a loud and glad talking in different parts of the room.

"Where are the villages? Show them to us."

"There! Mars la Tour. Gravelotte must be there."

"Then our people must have turned the wrong way round, with their faces towards Germany."

"Donnerwetter!"

"That's another clever trick of Moltke's."

"We will have illuminations, certainly."

"If they can in the town so can we."

"What is it called? Say it again."

"Mars la Tour."

"No; where the Ninth have been."

"Gravelotte."

"Verneville."

The names stand now in many churches and on many memorial tablets in Schleswig-Holstein.

"What does it say of the losses?"

"The losses are great, but they cannot be ascertained yet. They are still finding the wounded."

From the door there came a high voice: "They have been lying in their blood twenty-four hours!"

It was Pastor Frisius who spoke. He stood there, slender and a little bent, with his angular, beardless face.

At the desk they were speaking in low tones. The widow Thiel, whose son Heinrich was at the front, had stepped up. Close beside her stood Antje Witt, the head servant at the Strandigerhof, who was supposed to be betrothed to Heinrich Thiel. Her brother too, Reimer Witt, was at the war. Antje had noble free features and dark hair; she was fresh and tall, and greatly beloved for her kindness. People said of her that she was not clever, indeed almost stupid; she had always a quiet, hesitating manner, and the glance of her large eyes was without expression.

"Is there any news of the Eighty-fifth?" asked the widow Thiel. "They were in the thick of it."

Then Antje Witt took courage. "He said that he would write at once."

Some middle-aged men spoke of Kolding and Ibstedt. Women sat here and there on the forms, jested over the anxious face of Antje Witt as she stood at the desk, and spoke laughingly of the illuminations which they would make.

"A letter?"

"No. But I have a post-card in my pocket," said Haller. "I forgot it and did not read it — there was such an uproar." He looked for it. "There, it is for you, Antje. Really!"

She stood near him with wide-open eyes, but she could not speak. She asked him to read, and she pointed to the card.

He glanced at it, groaned aloud and caught with both hands at the desk.

"What is it? What is it?"

"From Reimer Witt."

"Is he wounded?"

"Read yourself."

"Metz, eighteenth or nineteenth of August, I don't know which. I have to tell you that your Heinrich has fallen. I am going to see if I can find him; they say he is not far from our post, at the next village. I have been looking for him a

whole hour and cannot find him. Your brother Reimer, who has remained uninjured. It was a fearful day."

The widow Thiel pressed her lips together and looked straight before her. Pastor Frisius stood by her and stroked both her hands.

"Is he dead?" asked Antje.

Haller shrugged his shoulders, ventured to look at her and turned pale. He did not care to speak of it, but he said afterwards that he had never seen such desolate eyes as those of Antje Witt in that moment.

"Is he dead?" she asked again.

"Your brother writes so."

She turned slowly to go. When she reached the door she turned round and said aloud, and it seemed strange that she was not at all shy —

"I don't believe it. He was so happy when he went away."

"What are you saying, Frau Thiel?"

"I want," she said, "the others — all the others — to die too."

"O Thielsche, that is not right."

"Not right?" she said sharply. "Why should he fall and the others live? If I have no son, why should the others have sons? Do you think that I love my son less because I am a poor widow?"

"Thielsche," said a peasant woman, who had a son at the front, "be quiet, for Heaven's sake! Come with me; you shall have a pot of butter."

The widow began to weep. "I sent him a piece of bacon yesterday; he hasn't got it. Who will eat it now?"

"Yes — who?"

She wept bitterly. She seemed to be smaller than before, and as if her hair had grown greyer. The women surrounded her with their sympathy, loudly expressed and heartfelt, and she left the schoolroom. She had grown poorer, much poorer.

She sat for an hour longer in the schoolmaster's room near little Otto's cradle. The young wife knelt beside her and wept, the widow brooded. The young woman thought of the future, the old one of the past.

Late in the evening, when it was dark, Franz ordered a secret watch near the dyke. He said that it was on account of

the ships. Moreover, he did not care what Adjutant Strandiger or Private Heiderieter said about his commands.

They left the steward's cheerful room and crept along the road to the dyke. But on the way, when they had not gone further than the alders, Andrees refused to obey. He said that it was simple stupidity to go creeping through the night like this; it was no proper game. And he turned round and went home.

Franz and Heim went on alone. On the top of the dyke Heim was left behind as sentinel. He was ordered to crouch down in the grass near the fence, not to move, and above all not to sleep. His companion went alone, down into the dark "foreland." Heim sat and looked over the Wehl, whose water was quite black, to the reflection of light above the village. They had placed lights at the windows; the rejoicing over the victory had begun again.

The Strandigerhof lay still and dark; when Franz had demanded stormily that the lights should be lit, Frau Strandiger had begun to weep. She had cried a great deal since her husband had remained in the Watt. The schoolhouse too was in darkness; husband and wife sat together quietly and listened to the child's breathing.

In the midst of the village, where it sloped up to the church and bent to the left round the churchyard, the windows were lit on both sides. The house of the shopkeeper nearest the church was the brightest. The lights stood very close together, but the husband and wife were walking up and down before the house by the churchyard; they looked at the lights and cried quietly. They had one child in the churchyard and one before Metz.

Heim sat and wondered at the courage of his friend, who had vanished in the black depth, and Heim began to dream. He was going with his friend Reimer Witt into the turmoil of battle at Metz. Red-hot cannon-balls roared against the town; the noise was greater than in the playground, and there was the reflection of light over Metz. He and Reimer were the first, the first of all.

They beat in the gate—it looked like the gate of the stable at the Strandigerhof; Bazaine knelt down before Heim, but Reimer would grant no pardon. King Wilhelm came up on his black horse, a gold crown on his white hair, and praised

them both, and the only doubt was which of them should have the right to ride always next to the king.

Heim awoke. Antje Witt was sitting by him on the fence, and it was very dark. Antje Witt said —

“ Give me your hand, Heim.”

She spoke in a curious way, like some one stupid with drink. He trembled as he gave her his hand. She pressed the warm, boyish hand, and said in her heavy speech —

“ His hand was as warm when he went away three weeks ago; and you are not dead — he can’t be dead, either — Or are you dead?” she asked, and looked closely in his eyes. Then he saw that her face was quite distorted; he gave a loud cry, tore himself loose, ran away as quickly as he could, and came crying to the Heidehof. The housekeeper could neither quiet him nor learn what had happened; he was ashamed because he did not know how much had really happened and how much was a dream.

The next day Franz Strandiger reported that there had been strange black ships in the Priel, but that they had gone away because they had discovered from his shouts that they could not hope to land unobserved.

The presence of these black ships was credited then and many years afterwards very widely along the coast.

These were the warlike adventures of “ The Three Comrades,” and it was in this way that the children played on the threshold of the fearful war.

## CHAPTER II.

A SMOOTH expanse of heath extended from the village to the road. Heim Heiderieter lay stretched at full length in the heather; it was a May day and somewhat misty, and any one lying as he lay, full length on the heath, would see nothing more on one side than the edge of the wood—a small wood beaten down by the western storms—and on the other the church tower, some thatched roofs and tree-tops. It was possible to see so much, but no more. For Heim Heiderieter all the rest of the world lay hidden in mist, though he was already sixteen and had lived through the time of the French war and was translating Homer with Pastor Frisius.

On the edge of the heath to the west, and not far from the village, there was a broad, low straw roof, whose sides almost reached the ground. It seemed trying to look over the heath, and loomed indolently through the mist.

Heim Heiderieter's father lived there; his mother had been dead a long time; he had never had either brothers or sisters. He had plenty of opportunity to become a true Heiderieter.

The Heiderieters had lived for nearly three hundred years in that house on the edge of the heath. They were always most truly themselves when the mist covered the heath. For the Heiderieters the world and things around them always revealed themselves as hidden in mist and cloud. It was through this that their inheritance had neither grown greater nor more valuable. They owned the heath as well as some good land in the March, but the heath was still in its old uncultivated condition, as it had been in the days of the first Heiderieters. They had always room enough to stretch their long bodies in the heather and look out into the mist which hid the world from their dreaming eyes.

Pastor Frisius says "the Heiderieters are lazy and hate work;" but Pastor Frisius does not know men, and has a somewhat slow nature himself. Schoolmaster Haller says "they are a fine interesting race;" but Schoolmaster Haller

grows stouter every day, takes life more easily, and looks at everything from the sunny side.

Neither view is quite right, but the truth lies between: the Heiderieters are clever, but they are lazy.

When the countryman shows the potatoes which he has grown, he takes a handful from the sack, and says, "These are the smallest;" and another handful, and says, "These are the largest; the rest are between."

If we treat the Heiderieters this way, the most important was the one who lived two hundred and fifty years ago, and whose name ranks among the artists of his land. As every one acquainted with the history of art is aware, he was a sculptor. Since his time and the men of his time gave him no opportunity to achieve anything great in marble or bronze, he wrought only small things. There are, however, in a few mansions in the country, such as the castle at Husum, some chimneypieces and door lintels which show a noble and vigorous style.

Very little is known of his life. He is said to have been of noble appearance, and to have been driven by a love-affair from the castles where he earned good wages. He went to one of the Hanse towns and gained the reputation of knowing how to combine art and handicraft. But his old age was spent on the heath, and he died there; this is a noticeable fact. Had the Heiderieter nature come to the fore again? And was it the fine side or the lazy one?

The least of all the Heiderieters was the living one, Heim's father. What can we say of him?

If you go from the wood to the house you cross a broad piece of heath whose surface shows small, short waves under the heather. His father had made this piece of land fruitful after great toil, had got good rye harvests from it and then died. His son did not even trouble to sow it, and the heath swallowed it up. Below the heath there lay, like frozen waves, the furrows of the plough.

We may add that a malicious suggestion was once made that he should be the church architect. Pastor Frisius refused with decision, since he hoped little from an architect who could not keep his own house or even his own head clean. No, this Heiderieter was not fine; he was only lazy. For the last twenty years of his life he had spent his time in digging up the graves

of the Huns which lay on his heath. He had occupied himself in this way so exclusively and so long that his son Heim came to believe that life was best spent in digging up interesting things for the love of the task itself, and that, since it was not possible to open all the graves in the world, it was best to lie on the heath in summer and sit behind the stove in winter and dream of what might be in them. He was in a fair way to become a true Heiderieter.

People dispute over the name Heiderieter. According to Schoolmaster Haller it means *Heidereiter*, a man who rides over the heath, a hunter or watchman. Pastor Frisius says that it means *Heidereisser*, a man who tears up the heath and makes it fruitful. If you estimate the Heiderieters by this version of their name, there is, from first to last, only one — Heim's grandfather — who has deserved it. All the others did not take even the trouble to keep away the heather, encroaching as it always was, from the straw roof under which they sat and dreamed.

Heim lay on the heath and watched his father, who had been for several days slowly and carefully digging up a grave. He heard the soft noise of the spade, the light rattling made by the falling earth. There was no other sound. The two were silent; they seldom talked. Each wove his own dream, and a Heiderieter had always something to dream over.

The spade rattled against a stone. The old man laid his tools down and went across to the Heidehof. He had, as usual, forgotten the box in which he put what he found. His old grey coat hung down to his knees in front; he had a large head, and his hair and beard, grey, almost white as they were, stood out in confusion; he trod heavily, and carried himself badly; his short body was bent with age and indolence.

Heim lay and looked after the old man, then he remembered that the spade had struck against something. He thrust away his last dream into that delightful chamber of his mind which held so many, and fixed his keen eyes on the place where he perceived the stone in the ground. He crept up slowly; his long arms and legs were encased in a drill suit, and he had heavy laced shoes; he looked like a great grey lizard. He lay down and tried to move apart the two stones which formed the border of the grave, but could not manage it. There was nothing hasty in his movements; he forced his long brown hand labori-

ously between the stones; the space within was filled with a confused mass, and he examined it carefully. Then there was a sudden jerk in his long body, a small heap of brown earth flew out of the hole between the stones, and immediately afterwards a yellow circlet with the breadth of a man's finger—a bracelet.

"I have three now," he said to himself, and took the circlet, turned it round and weighed it in his hand. "Three—but this is the heaviest." He looked thoughtfully at the circlet. "If I could only do something with it. At last! I have three, and done nothing with any."

The old man returned across the heath. His loose figure looked wavering and uncertain through the mist. He had a box under his arm and an iron stake in his hand.

"Take it," he said.

Heim had to stand up and grasp the stake. When the old man could not manage to move the great stone which covered the grave Heim helped him and it moved. They both bent down and looked in the interior.

"A mouse," said the old man.

"A mole," said Heim, and carefully wiped away the trace which showed the impress of his finger.

They did not say a word while they sought carefully through the earth and laid even the smallest scraps and pieces in the box. At length the urn was stowed away. The old man passed his finger over the earth, feeling it lightly, and raised his head.

"You can go home," he said.

Heim went over the heath with slow, tranquil steps, his hands deep in his trousers pockets; he did not go to the Heidehof, but to the Wodanshill which lay on the edge of the wood. He smiled proudly as he went. "Now he will find the dagger—well, let him!"

In ten minutes he reached the hill. There was a little height covered with heather which made a kind of seat, and there he took his place between two white birch-trees and began to polish the bracelet on the hard material of his jacket.

He worked very quietly and calmly for two whole hours; only in his half-opened eyes there was life—strange, eventful life as in the graves on the heath. He was picturing to himself what he would do with the three bracelets, and in what way the great wonderful opportunity would come.

The sun had conquered the mist, it lay clear and warm in the west, and seemed almost to rest on the sea with golden, outstretched wings. But you must have known that it was the sea; you would never have guessed it.

Yes, that vast silver band on the edge of the earth which lay in the west as if it divided the kingdom of God from that of man, that was the North Sea far out at ebb-tide.

The road which led from the world into the loneliness of the heath came slantingly from the wood behind the Wodans-hill.

On that evening the quiet wood-path which so few people traversed had suddenly grown full of life. Footsteps approached, and the voices of men and women sounded up between the trees of the Wodanshill.

Heim Heiderieter put the bracelet back in his pocket and looked around in astonishment.

Tired men were going along the sandy road; they were dressed in dark cloth, and their steps were eloquent of a long journey and heavy toil. Behind them were four or five women, also tired but still talkative. One of them, a stout woman with strongly marked features, caught sight of the boy on the hill and asked him in the strange High German speech how far it was to the next town. He got up and went down the hill.

"An hour," he said; "but you must go faster."

They went on, looking round from time to time, and Heim watched them, his brown fingers clasped round the white stem of the birch. The coloured handkerchiefs of the women rose and fell in a regular motion. And now they all looked round, and their clear laughter rang back along the path to the wood.

Heim was in the midst of his dreams. He was living through what he had read that morning in Pastor Frisius' study. His face had taken an expression of distress; deep furrows stood upright over his eyes, his mouth was firmly compressed and the corners drawn down. He cowered near the birch-tree, nearly hidden by underwood.

He was Ulysses, he had been reading about Ulysses in the last few weeks, and the hero's adventures filled his soul. He had returned home unrecognized, and was listening from his hiding-place to the train of insolent wooers.

As they passed on he called threateningly after them:

"Ah! Dogs! Ye thought I would never come homeward  
Out of the city of Troy. Your greed has eaten my goods up,  
Ye have forced and burdened the women here in my palace walls,  
And while I yet live ye have courted and wooed my wife, ye hateful!  
Have ye had fear of the gods, those dwellers in highest heaven?  
Or lest eternal shame upon your memory rested?  
Now is the hour of death for each and all of you waiting."

A happy laugh rang from the wood, and a child's voice asked, "Are you Ulysses?" There sat a pretty girl some fourteen years old; she wore a bright red handkerchief, and was sitting on the root of a tree, tired with her journey.

Heim Heiderieter got up quickly and looked with gladness at the fresh young face. His cheeks were dyed crimson, his curly fair hair was gilded by the evening light, and his eyes were full of light and of questioning.

"Come up here," he said hastily. He turned half round and pointed to the seat.

"But the others are going on!"

"Well, they will stay in the town. You can easily find them. Sit down here. Are you listening? Just here. You can do it quite safely."

He waved and beckoned. His whole figure was full of excitement, his eyes laughed and shone, and, though he was speaking High German, the words fell like pearls from his lips — smooth and round and light. For this was life! this was reality! All the rest — his father, the village, the March — all that was only a tedious dream. But this was bright, blissful reality!

He could say now all the things he had planned so often when he lay on the heath. The great event which he had imagined, which he had pictured to himself in such lively colours and down to the smallest details, this great event had come at last.

She really was there on the seat. The bright handkerchief had fallen back; her hair was almost black and somewhat curly, it shone in the evening sun with a glitter like bronze. She looked at him curiously and smiled a little; she leaned comfortably against the stem of the birch with her strong, vigorous figure.

"You must be quite happy," he said, "and not a bit afraid."

He raised his hand magnificently and pointed across the heath.

"All that belongs to us; we have land in the March as well, and horses, and cows. That is our kingdom. And we know how to treat a guest. I am reading the poet Homer."

"I have heard of him," she said.

"Of course. You are a king's daughter." And he laughed aloud and gladly as he had never laughed before.

"You speak so beautifully, quite differently from the way they talk here. Where do you come from?"

"A long way — from the south."

"Do you belong to those people?"

"I do now, but I did not before. They are brickmakers from Lippe Detmold! there is a new brick-field just made near your town and they are going to work there."

"Where are your parents?"

"My parents lived in Hesse, and have been dead a long time."

She looked thoughtfully across the heath and seemed very tired.

He turned to her quickly. "You must stay with me. Don't you see that we are both quite alone in the world? There to the west and south is the sea, there to the north is the heath, and to the east there are woods, a thousand miles deep."

She laughed again, and her eyes showed that she delighted in his fairy-tales.

"What next?" she asked.

"The people in Homer," he said in his magnificent way, "say 'thou' to one another."

He felt for her hand, and said, laughing, half embarrassed and half proudly, "I like you tremendously."

"That is lovely," she answered, and looked after the travellers. "No one has loved me before and no one has asked me what I wanted to do."

"What do you want?"

"Now? To stay with you."

"Do you see? It is like people were then. We are doing what we want. Come; we will go into the wood."

"But I am tired."

"I know a splendid place by the brook; you can sit down there, and I will tell you everything I have read and more too."

She went with him slowly. The twigs of the low bushes closed lightly behind them like doors. The wind held its breath and the sun gazed after them. The ants stood still on their busy paths and the birds broke off in the midst of the chorus they were practising.

On the edge of the wood were slender-stemmed birch-trees; beneath them ran a small clear brook; it flowed swiftly over the white sand, babbling to itself. It was so tiny that it was easy to step across. He went first, then gave her his hand to help her. It was the first time he had been near a girl. He felt as he had done lately when he had been alone in the church with Pastor Frisius and laid the red Easter cloth on the altar.

He let go her hand and pointed to the moss at his feet which slanted up to the roots of the birch-trees. It was a deep, soft carpet, studded with bright points.

She sank down in her weariness and rested her head on her hand, and he sat before her. He talked in the most eager way, now leaning forward on both elbows, now raising himself to his knees so that she laughed at his queer postures, and said that he sat like a hare among cabbages except that his ears were not the same. And she glanced at his ears, which were finely shaped and lay close to his head under the curly hair.

They talked to each other as if they had grown up together, as an affectionate brother talks to a little sister. He had laid aside all shyness. The High German, which he had never spoken except to the pastor, seemed to flow from his lips, but he was not surprised at anything; it was all real, so real.

He told her of the heath and the North Sea and what had happened in the olden days on the heath and the highways, and he exhibited all his manifold wisdom with the greatest importance, and explained it with so many queer stiff movements of his hands that she said to him, "You are like a young hound." She had folded her hands behind her head, and she lay back against them and laughed. She looked very comfortable lying there, and her eyes showed how happy she was.

"Now I will tell you something else; it happened to me. You shall say if it is true." He moved his head as if to keep time, and began. The wind blew gently from the heath through the wood and stirred the young leaves; the sun painted numberless red spots on the floor of the wood which mingled together and seemed trying to seize each other.

## THE THREE COMRADES

## "BY THE BROOK

" The boy lies by the brookside,  
 In May when the woods are deep,  
 The streamlet's hasty murmur  
 Closes his eyes in sleep.

" And as he lies in the deep moss,  
 There comes a wonderful dream,  
 Like a bell in a silent chamber  
 He hears the voice of the stream.

" " What sayest thou to my garment?  
 Soft silver covers my breast,  
 My robe is silken and snowy  
 And green moss borders the rest.

" " What sayest thou to my singing?  
 It sounds so tender and clear,  
 And never shall it sound joyless  
 Or harsh and hard to thine ear!

" " What sayest thou to my glances?  
 I must wander far and wide,  
 I cannot repose to love thee,  
 I must go with the time and tide.

" " Dost thou flee? Is everything ended?  
 He cries aloud in his dream,  
 With both his hands he seizes  
 The water and foam of the stream.

" And as the wave grows silent  
 And the streamlet tranquil too,  
 From the bright silver waters  
 A mournful face looks through.

" And all around the mosses  
 And grasses grieve in their way,  
 And the streamlet on its journey  
 Sobs even till this day."

She shrugged her shoulders and asked, " Did you make that up? "

"It happened to me. It really happened."

"You are a scamp," she said. "I see through you." She lay back again and stretched out her full length, blinking in the sunbeams which came slantingly through the birch twigs. He sat before her and looked at her.

"Before you go away," he cried, "we must exchange gifts; you know they always did that in the olden days."

"But I have nothing."

"You must think of something."

She looked reflectively at him, then turned her head away sadly.

"I must get up and go."

"Can't you stay?"

"I am an hour behind the rest. Oh, if I could only go home?"

"Will you write to me when you get home? I am called Heim Heiderieter."

She was not listening to him, the dream had flown. "Show me the way quickly."

He went before her through the bushes and bent the twigs carefully aside. They came out on the path. They looked at each other, drew a deep breath, and did not stir.

"Go up there! then we can see each other for a long time still."

"It will soon be dark. I am going now."

"Yes," he said, quickly. "You must go at once; but here, you must take something from me, do you see? As a gift?" and he gave her the bracelet which he had taken in his hand. "It is gold," he said. "Keep it carefully so that I may know you when we are both grown up."

"But dare I take it? It is for rich people."

"It was found," he said, proudly, "in the land which belongs to us."

With her eyes still fixed on the bracelet which she held in her hand, she turned and went slowly away.

His eyes clung to her figure. Some subtle thrill seemed to pass between them. They returned once more and shook hands. Then each went away quietly.

The Wodanshill lay in its solitude on the edge of the wood. The brook murmured on. The boy went quietly home across the heath.

In the meanwhile old Heiderieter had returned home. In the kitchen Telsche Spieker stood by the fire on the open hearth. He went past her and stepped into the best room, through the broad double door with its diamond-shaped panes of glass and ornamental woodwork.

Two hundred and fifty years ago the Heidehaus had belonged to the curate, and combined in a very comfortable way the home of a student and that of a peasant. That they should acquire such a house just at that time was typical of the Heiderieters of that day. It was well calculated to please a race who were half artists and half peasants.

The old man trailed his long steps through the old-fashioned stately room with its spare furniture; he found a key in the depth of his pocket and opened a little door on the left. Dusty curtains hung closely above the two windows; he drew one aside, and when he had convinced himself that the schoolroom overlooking his house was empty, he surveyed his treasures. And here, among these dead spoils of the grave, spread out on the wooden tables, the whole nature of the man seemed to change as that of his child had changed at the sight of the young girl.

He talked to himself eagerly and somewhat loudly; he placed the box on the edge of the table, took out its contents with hands which trembled in their haste and laid them in the place appropriate to their period and type. Last of all he took out a sword; it was almost as long as a man's arm, quite straight and some three fingers broad; he placed it by two others of the same kind and said: "Now there are three!" His old wrinkled face was full of pleasure. Then he made a list of his spoils with a not unskilful pen, and indicated the exact place and construction of the grave on a map he had; it was a very comprehensive map which showed in detail the whole surface of the heath. He did everything with quick movements and with an ardour which plainly revealed that his whole soul was in his task, that he had unusual talent for it, and that it kindled all his imagination, and awoke a most genuine love.

When evening came the father and son sat at the table in the middle of the best room; they sat under the lamp late into the night. The boy tried to translate some pages of Homer and the father read in an old calendar. They sat there dumb and silent, all the light in them quenched. Telsche Spieker had

gone over to Schoolmaster Haller's, for his wife was a great friend of hers, and then to bed, tired of the tedious men in the big room.

The next day brought a bright, clear atmosphere. The heath lay there like a brown child reclining on its back, sunburnt, yet not displeased with the sun, which shone in her lovely face and quiet eyes.

It was a day to lie on the heath, to be surprised and overpowered by shapes of the imagination, not to defend oneself against them, in the end not even to stir, but endlessly to dream and dream. It was a day that might have been sent from heaven especially for a Heiderieter.

Heim returned home from the vicarage about six o'clock in the evening, vexed with Pastor Frisius, who had kept him in the whole day. It was not that he disliked mathematics or translating Virgil, but that such weather should pass unused, that is to say not spent in dreaming, simply tortured him. At last when the shadows of the fir-trees were growing longer and longer he took courage and asked to be dismissed, and Pastor Frisius, who was sitting at his writing-table buried in thought, had nodded consent without realizing what he did.

Once in the Heidehof, Heim laid his books on the table and then left the house. When he saw the still broad heath before him, in the distance the wood, and before it the Wodanshill, the same light sparkled in his eyes which had burnt there the previous day by the brook.

Suddenly he was roused. Some one sprang over the top of the earth wall with a shout. Immediately behind him Andrees Strandiger appeared. Heim Heiderieter experienced genuine distress. A stranger! A young man stood there before him, tall and slender, well dressed, with calm, self-confident bearing.

Heim attempted to bow but did not succeed, and we may as well say at once that however often he tried in the future he never did succeed, so that when, later on, he realized himself and his limitations, he gave up attempting to make bows and went through life as nature had intended he should.

Andrees Strandiger gave him his hand and said: "Of course you did not remember that the Whitsuntide holidays had begun? Don't you know Franz Strandiger?"

Heim grew red and nodded.

Franz came up and held out his hand kindly. "We will say 'thou' to one another."

"Come," said Andrees.

Franz stretched out both arms. "Yes, we are going on the heath! We have holidays! holidays!"

Andrees turned to Heim. "When are you coming to school?"

"In the autumn. Pastor Frisius hopes that I may be placed in the second class."

"What are you going to be?"

"I don't know," said Heim in distress. "I must get to know something first."

Andrees looked serious and frowned. "One ought to know what one intends to do."

No! Heim did not know that. To-day he wanted one thing and to-morrow another, and for the most part it was something strange and extraordinary. For a long time he wished to be a second Schiller, till he discovered to his grief that Schiller had imagined before him all those things which he, Heim, had dreamt on the heath. At a later period he anticipated the time when he might make his first expedition to the North Pole, and it was a real torture to him to discover that here also he had been forestalled. He had also thought of being a statesman or a general; but Bismarck and Moltke had done all that would be necessary for a long time on those lines. It was different with Africa! Yes, Africa! He buried both hands in his big pockets and began to dream. And what he dreamt was as vivid as reality. He was in the Indian Ocean to the left of Zanzibar, and he landed near Daresalaam, a white cork helmet on the back of his head.

Franz Strandiger's voice called him back to the Wodansheath.

"I am going to be a stock-broker," he said. "There is money in it. And if you have money you are a free man. My sister Lena said to me at Easter when I was in Berlin, 'Be sure, Franz, to get rich soon, then I shall come in for some of the glory, and I can get a captain of the guard.'" He turned to Heim, "Just think, that girl has hardly got long skirts, and she thinks of such things? Can you believe it?"

No! Heim could not, in spite of all the riches of his imagination. In his perplexity he turned to Andrees —

"What are you going to be, Andrees?" He only asked to get rid of Franz, whose self-confidence dismayed him.

"I," said Andrees, "I am going to serve my country."

Franz Strandiger whizzed his stick through the air. "How do you intend to do that?"

"I am going to be a government official or a statesman, then I will manage to do somehow what our people need."

Heim bent his curly head, listened quietly, and was astounded: "How calmly he says that. Yet he will do it. He will do it quite early." And Heim began to dream again, his hands sunk in his pockets, he looked disconsolately across the heath. "Then when he is great he will send me as his ambassador to Africa with troops and a lot of money."

With a dreamy movement he raised his right hand, pushed the cork helmet to the back of his head, and breathed deep and loud.

"Well?" asked Franz, and his eyes sparkled slyly.

Then Heim uttered his dreams aloud. "I shall think," he said quietly and slowly, "that I have failed in life if I have not at least two orders by the time I am thirty."

Franz laughed aloud. He had the handsome face of the Strandigers, and the whole of it sparkled with scorn. He roused Heim roughly from his dreams, and almost made him tremble with horror as he shook his hand.

"I will remind you of your words, Heim Heiderieter, when you are thirty. Well, you have still fourteen years to gain your laurels."

"And you," said Andrees sharply, "to your money-bag?"

"And you," cried Franz, "to the government!" He snapped his fingers and laughed. "I shall not forget this memorable day when three foolish boys divided the world among them."

"Come," said Andrees, "we will turn back. You must come with me to the Strandigerhof. Something very important has happened to-day. You remember that some years ago a captain from Hamburg visited the Strandigerhof, with his wife and children, and stayed three or four weeks; do you remember the two little girls? Well, the parents are both dead. First the wife, who was a distant relative of my mother's; then her husband, who went to South America and died of yellow fever.

He left directions that, in case of his death, my mother should be asked to bring up the children. He wrote that when he and his wife visited my mother, they both loved her so much, and found her so sympathetic, that now, in his heart's anguish, he ventured to make this daring request for his children's sake. You can imagine how my mother answered the letter."

"I know," said Heim quickly. "She said: 'In God's name!' She is the best woman in the world. She is my mother, too."

Andrees nodded, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder. So for awhile they went on together, to the west, towards the edge of the heath. Before them, twenty or thirty feet below, stretched the even surface of the March.

These fields at their feet, traversed by ditches, as far as the dyke, and the dyke itself, and the "foreland" as far as the Watt, all belonged to the Strandigers. No one could dispute their title either to the new green land that was forming out in the "foreland" and in the Watt itself; they themselves had conquered this March from the sea, and, as far back as people could remember or read, they had kept the dyke in order at their own expense and with their own labour, and had dug out the trenches in the "foreland" so that the mud could collect and form new fruitful land. But the old record of the dyke, the document which lies in the Landrat's office in the town market, does not say much of the increasing land, but says a great deal of breaches in the dyke.

"The so-called Strandigers shall, for the sake of the safety of the land, be held and pledged in this year, by St. Martin's day, to put in good order the 'corpus' of the dyke which belongs to them;" or "the so-called Strandigers shall, in this year, make a stone dam seventy feet long, of the kind customary in the country, from the corner of the Stulper Dyke as far as the road opposite their house, everywhere where the flood and tide of November 3rd have torn away the grass."

Only in the last thirty years had it been different. The sea has moods. Sometimes it howls, sometimes it laughs; sometimes it is greedy, sometimes generous. It became very generous, and the Strandigers, always energetic and tenacious, Frisian in their origin, people said, found fresh work on the other side of the dyke. They made long sloping trenches into the Watt; the short grass grew further and further on the

rounded ridges between the trenches, and the green "foreland" already brought Frau Strandiger over three thousand marks in yearly rent.

But out there, far out in the Watt, four hours' journey away, on the very edge of the surf, a long white chain of dunes had risen, and were continually growing higher, and, protected by these dunes, in the direction of the firm land, a wide green field had slowly formed.

This island is called Flackelholm. It is but little known, since it is new, lies quite by itself, and it is difficult to reach because of the Watt and the surf. There are maps which do not show it, and even the treatises which specially describe the Halligs — the reclaimed lands — say nothing of it.

Yet it, too, is a Hallig, a genuine part of the old Cimbrian marsh which had sunk completely, but has reappeared. And, most probably, it is of all the Halligs the one which has the greatest future. The others must be protected, or they would be devoured by the sea; they need a stone dam on which the sea can break its teeth, but Flackelholm grows of itself, and extends from year to year. The sea itself has built a wall before it, a kind of frontier, a long high rampart of white sand. If you go from Hamburg to Heligoland, and take a good glass, when the land has disappeared on the right you can see the dunes shine northwards in the sea; you can even recognize the flagstaff, which has been pieced together from stranded bamboo, and perhaps see a man standing near it; he lives there now, after he has experienced the events we are going to relate.

As the friends went up the drive, under the shadow of the high elms, the stately coach stopped before the front door. There were two children, clothed in black, and Frau Strandiger was standing by them, stroking their cheeks by turns, careful not to neglect either. The elder, who was fourteen years old, was dark, with soft brown eyes, and she was crying; Ingeborg was eight, and had lively blue eyes; she looked with a glance full of confidence on everything, the friendly lady with the slow, gentle voice and eyes short-sighted from weeping, and on the great grey house. Then, with a sudden movement of her head — which sent her red-gold hair flying from one shoulder to the other — she discovered the three boys, who stepped slowly from under the trees.

"See," said Frau Strandiger, "there come your friends." And she introduced them.

Heim stood shyly behind Frau Strandiger, and waited till his turn came. He looked up at the old crows' nests, high up in the elm-trees, and counted them. Only twice, each time between two nests, his eyes turned quickly and shyly from the noble trees to the young children who had such soft voices and such lovely hair. But when the children glanced at him, Heim looked back at the old crows, who were shouting down their opinion of the world in discordant cries.

"They are much too fine for me," thought Heim.

"Quark! quark!"

"I shall never feel at ease with them," lamented Heim.

"Quark! quark!"

So the old fellow croaked his sullen answer, and no one could have told how long the conversation might have lasted; but the children stepped up to Heim and greeted him.

After supper they went out on the path round the great lawn; the strong trunks of the trees stood out like columns, the darkness falling between them. There was still a tender evening light which came from the west, from the sea; it was reflected in both windows of the gable, and looked with its sweet half-blind eyes on the people walking through the garden. They went in this order: in front, Franz Strandiger with the dark-haired Maria beside him. He was telling her in his keen, eager way of the life of the great city — its parades, streets and palaces — and she listened confidingly, and looked up at him from time to time.

He kept himself well in hand, for he had an instinctive knowledge of human nature, but when in his eagerness to give an accurate picture, he spoke jestingly of something sad, or pathetic, or terrible, she grew shy at once and looked away from him to Andrees and Heim, with eyes which seemed to ask mournfully, "Are you like that too?" Andrees, who kept her in sight, replied each time with his kindest look. But Heim's eyes always turned immediately to the shadow of the elms.

Andrees had taken little Ingeborg's hand. "How old are you, Ingeborg Landt?"

"Eight," and she gave a quick leap.

"I am sixteen. How much older am I than you? One, two — "

"Eight years, you stupid!" she said, and sprang again.

"Why are you always making curtseys?"

"That is not a curtsey." Her voice had grown suddenly much deeper. "That is only fun — because we are going so slowly."

"Aha! You would like to race with me?"

"Yes, shall we?"

He shook his head in a judicious way. "That is not for grown-up people!" he said.

Then she walked on quietly, holding his hand. Their comradeship was at an end. He had drawn away and grown strange. She had been attracted to him, but she was repulsed, and her thoughts turned to Franz Strandiger, who passed them, talking gaily. "Andrees shall show me the house to-morrow," she thought; "and the horses and the lambs. I will play at hide-and-seek with Franz among the trees. I will hide there behind the big tree; I will draw my dress close and he won't see me. But I don't like the other boy. I won't say a word to him. He has grey shoes with leather straps."

Heim walked beside Frau Strandiger, and listened quietly while she talked about the children and their school reports, and told him how Frisius and Haller were going to give them lessons. Meanwhile he was subduing some tribes on Lake Tanganyika, who had risen against him for the third time after they had sworn fidelity in the fullest and most solemn way; and he looked sideways into the dark shadows, to see if there were not wild black men with fiery eyes lurking there, ready to fall on the beautiful child who was walking by Franz Strandiger, and who looked at him, Heim Heidereiter, as if she needed help. But Maria Landt only thought when he glanced shyly at her, "What a dear, good fellow he must be!"

The next evening Andrees was entering the house at the same time as Maria, and raised his cap as she passed him. "If you like," he said, "I will show you the view we have upstairs."

They went together up the gloomy, worn staircase; it was at the left of the door, broad and stately, and had wide dark bannisters. There was no window in the passage they entered, and there were two steps in the middle, so he had to take her hand. It was a soft, warm hand which lay trustfully in his, and he

did not let it go at once, but led her to the end of the passage and up a steep, narrow flight of stairs, which had a smooth wooden pole as a handrail.

"Ingeborg is very happy here," she said. "When we left Hamburg she cried."

"And you?"

"I? At first I was afraid, especially of you boys. I thought you were proud. Big boys are often so proud."

"I am not a boy now."

She was silent and hung her head. "Don't be vexed," she said, all but crying. Her sister Ingeborg would have laughed, but she struggled with her tears.

He pushed the door open with his foot; they stood in a room which had been made at the very end of the house, under the roof. In the steep wall at the gable end was a broad window. There were two smaller ones with iron frames on opposite sides of the sloping roof; one looked to the east and the heath, the other to the west and the sea. Many peasant houses on the shore have such windows or skylights; in stormy weather people can look across the dyke and see for themselves what it is like in the "foreland" and in the Watt, whether the cattle can feed in safety, or if the spring tide is dangerous.

"Come," he said, "this way;" and kindly but patronizingly, as a brother might with a younger sister, he placed his arm round her shoulders and drew her to the gable window. He was bigger than she, tall, and with the awkwardness of his age; his nose was straight and proud — an inheritance from the Strandigers, the sign of their family — his mouth was finely formed, but severe; his eyes were full of pride, but not as yet of fire; his forehead was broad and low; he had gleaming dark hair that lay smoothly round his head, and was higher behind than in front, like Ingeborg's blond hair. If you stand before Andrees and Ingeborg, and are tall enough, you can see a strongly marked parting, which runs steeply up to the back of the head.

No one has ever seen Andrees Strandiger with rough hair; it is always neat and shining, and he has the habit of smoothing it with a careful motion of his hand, a movement he keeps even now this winter, when he is beginning to be well known and even famous in the country. The movement reveals some

degree of vanity, but above all, a pedantic ceremoniousness and great deliberation in everything.

Held in his arm she stepped close to the window, but her heart could not take in what her eyes saw; she only thought "how close he holds me!" She was gentle, and yielded readily to every impression, and her heart was beating now for joy.

"Do you see the Wehl? It is deep."

She looked over the water. "Whom do those little houses belong to?" she asked suddenly.

The evening sun was reflected in the small low windows of Eschenwinkel, which burnt brilliantly in the yellow light.

"They are the labourers' houses," he said, and tried to draw her away. But she did not yield to his arm.

"There are children playing there," she said, "with bare feet."

"Let them play."

He drew her towards the other window looking eastwards. The broad heath was outspread in the evening sunlight. First it rose some twenty feet, then extended perfectly level as far as the wood and, towards the south, to the end of the earth.

"Do you see there on the edge of the heath, just before the village, that big thatched roof? Heim Heiderieter lives there!"

"Ah — how nice! He is kind! Isn't he?"

He turned her round in his arm. She raised her delicate face to his, happy and a little shy.

"You say Heim is kind! Why don't you say that he is handsome? I mean, he has curly hair and nice clever eyes?"

She nodded. "Yes! he has."

"Well then? Be candid!"

"But what good would that be to him if he were not kind?"

She looked sideways and caught sight of the children again. "See," she said, laughing softly. "They are dancing in a ring and singing."

He was impatient and drew her to the other window, where the sun shone from the west. It was high tide, and the waves showed white foam.

"What do you say to that, Maria Landt? The waves are dancing in a ring and singing."

The child's eyes sped over the wide water as a sea-gull flies when it has risen from the dyke too soon, and can find no dry

spot for its feet. She had spent her youth amid the walls of a great city, and the vast prospect overwhelmed her. Her exclamation seemed almost a prayer.

"How big the earth is! Oh! I never knew how big it was! It frightens me."

He laughed shortly. The Strandigers never laugh like other people — it is always short and cold.

"I thought you would be pleased by the big things and not see the little ones. But you liked the barefooted children of Eschenwinkel and their wretched houses, and when you look at the sea you are afraid."

She collected her thoughts with difficulty. "I like the children playing under the ash-trees better than anything else I have seen."

"Yes. And then Heim Heiderieter and his house, and then? And when do I come in?"

"You can't expect me to think as you do, Andrees."

"Come!" he said, and went in front down the stairs. He did not give her his hand again. In the passage he stood still and said, "There are two steps here."

She went behind him, her expression very grave.

As they passed through the front door into the garden, Franz Strandiger was chasing Ingeborg over the grass. He had found her even behind the elm-tree. Their eyes were bright, and there was grace in every swift movement.

Heim Heiderieter was standing, his hands in his pockets; he bent his head forward and looked at the child as carefully as if he had been commissioned to make a picture of her as she ran.

## CHAPTER III.

HEIM and Andrees returned home in the middle of September. They had passed their final examination. His mother asked for the school-cap Andrees had worn in the first form and he gave it her.

We may as well say that, after her death eighteen years later, this cap was found stowed away; she had a chest of drawers made of hazel-wood, which stood at the head of her bed, and she kept the cap in the lowest drawer. There she kept too her bridal veil, ornamented on three sides with thread lace, which she had made herself, Andrees' first shoes of black kid and her husband's flat cloth cap, the one that had been thrown up by the waves the day after his death. There lay also the new smock of Bielefeld linen, the white cotton gloves, and the white cap she was to wear in her coffin. In her old age she always liked to wear white caps in the morning, and indeed the whole day. In our country neat old ladies have a special love for these white caps.

Andrees had bought for himself a kind of hunting cap which suited him well, and gave him a manly air. He was very quiet and sensible in his ways, and so certain of his own opinions that, though in courtesy he might have wished it, he could not agree either with the philosophy of Pastor Frisius or the more practical ideas of Schoolmaster Haller. His knowledge of life was quite perfect now, and his heart, as he knew well, would never lead him any way not perfectly assured by experience and reflection. He was a young man who knew what he wanted, who had saddled a strong young horse and was riding out from his school door into the world. His road was perfectly plain and beautiful, and pleasantly shaded. It would lead him to the great city where every one would welcome him: the girls would love him, the young men come to him for advice, and the old men value his thoughtfulness. He went to Berlin to live with the mother of Franz Strandiger.

Heim Heiderieter still wore the red cap of the first class, for he had never yet had sufficient money to buy a hat. He never troubled about money, even what was really necessary. Let his father go out in his old grey boots and get it where he could.

His thoughts were bright and happy as he crossed the dark autumn-tinted heath; he dreamt of old castles in the moonlight, of cheerful inns on mountainsides, or quiet forest paths where beautiful children wandered at their will, and the birds sang from the clustering leaves. He was going to Tübingen.

He sat beside Andrees on the turf seat of the Wodanshill looking out over the heath where the morning mist was rising; it looked like a coverlet, and the rays of the sun were lifting it like the soft warm hands of a mother. The visions Heim saw in his dream filled the wide dark space with bright figures.

In those days he was planning a poem, a romance — one he has not written yet — of the kind then customary. The hero was a knightly son of the heath, no Heiderieter but an Andrees Strandiger; he lived in that picturesque time when people were accustomed to clothe one leg in blue and the other in red; he was riding back from Tübingen to Holstein, and, crossing a bridge over the flooded Neckar, he saved a young girl's life. The father was drunken and hardly deserved his child, but he was very grateful, and the hero, with his wild young pride, demanded and obtained a promise from him that this same child, when she had grown to woman's estate, should be brought to him in Holstein, to his castle by the North Sea. And then after three years she arrived; she was tall and slender, with waving golden-brown hair and dark eyes; she had no one with her but an old servant; she spoke shyly and sadly, as if she were homesick; she looked mournfully over the sea, but her pride rose up like the dark brown steed the hero rode on the dunes. And he pretended to be cold and indifferent, and waited till she came to him, though his heart burnt with love like the morning sun in the windows of the bower which looked to the wood. And they rode together over the heath in swift gallops, and when her hair flew against his cheek, he leaned across to her horse and for the first time came close to her and asked for her love in the way women like so well — proud and yet humble.

"Won't that be splendid, Andrees?" He jumped up on to

the turf seat and pointed over the heath. "There — there they are riding! Do you see?"

"Those are dreams," said Andrees. "You must live in reality."

Another evening, when it was nearly time for them to go away, the two friends sat in the garden under the elm-tree south of the lawn. Heim had made a seat and table there, and Ingeborg had helped him.

They were quarrelling over the two girls. Heim said that Maria was too good for this world.

"Have you ever seen her in a temper? Have you ever seen her impatient, or cross, or angry? Is she ever proud to any one? If the Christianity which Frisius preaches about — " they always said Frisius now and not Pastor Frisius — " if it ever existed in any human soul it is in Maria Landt's." And he struck his hand on the edge of the table he had made.

Andrees leaned back and said, "We quite agree, but you put it in so many words: 'she is a saint.' And I say moreover, for that very reason she is not fitted for life. She is much too gentle, too trustful; she has a veil before her eyes. And she has no society but my mother and the children of Eschenwinkel. Such a gentle nature, Heim, and such gentle, childlike, sad companions. What will come of it all?"

"Your mother is almost blind. She needs Maria's help."

"Ingeborg, on the other hand, goes often to Haller and Frisius."

"Ingeborg," said Heim, with emphasis, "Ingeborg is just the opposite."

"Yes! Maria is a saint, and Ingeborg a witch."

"Well, not that! But a true German — proud and strong."

"I don't understand how you can be so interested in a child."

"Wait till she is four years older! She is one of the old German heroines like those who used to go out from this country to England. Strong, fair hair, touched with red; flashing grey-blue eyes. Her mother was a relation of your mother's, and your mother's family come from this neighbourhood, and belong to the old Horsten race. It is an historical fact that Hengist and Horsa, the chiefs of the emigrating Saxons, had owned farmsteads here and been settled in this neighbourhood."

"Now you are running wild."

"Ah! you have no imagination, Andrees!"

"You have, but you can't manage it. It carries you away."

"And you, Andrees, how do you get on with Maria?"

"You have just heard: she is a saint. But what is the good of asking? How do you get on with Ingeborg?"

Heim passed his large thin hand over his mouth and was silent; then he said suddenly—

"If I call her 'Dear Ingeborg!' she looks at me with *such* an expression and says 'Heim!'"

They sat awhile with thoughtful faces till the two girls came out from among the elms and passed through the garden; Maria was no longer a child, but still very lightly made; she had gentle, somewhat slow movements, and sweet eyes; Ingeborg was still a child, but taller than Maria, somewhat awkward in speech and movement, "the dryest reed stalk in the Wehl," said Andrees; "a flying arrow," said Heim.

The two rose politely and Heim said to Ingeborg, "Our friends in the town have written and told us they are going to-morrow. We are to go with them."

"Really?"

Maria looked at Andrees. "So soon, Andrees! To-morrow?"

"Then," said Ingeborg, "let us go on the heath once more. Come, Heim!"

That was always the way: Ingeborg went with Heim and Maria with Andrees.

Maria went quickly up the Wodanshill; she was distressed because Andrees was so strange and stiff to-day, and in her distress she sat down on the turf seat and laid her hand on the birch-tree. He joined her at once, and, angry because she was so calm, and because he had got no further, he put his arm round her in a hasty movement. The sun lay on the sea like a golden ball on a silver plate. The air was clear and pure as stainless glass; everything was still in the world, and it was as if the whole earth had no grief nor stain. Then for the first time she put her arm trustfully round his shoulders.

"Do you see, Maria, far away on the horizon, those long white lines, which come and go, and roll like great glittering snakes towards the sun? that is the rising tide."

"But what is that to the right of the sun, Andrees? O, look! a white mountain in the midst of the sea!"

"It must be surf somewhere. Where do you mean?"

She had laid her head lightly against his, while she pointed with her arm, and her hair prevented him from seeing.

He put away her arm, and now he saw plainly what it was in the sea, far away.

"O," he said, "one doesn't see that often. That is Flackelholm!"

She breathed deeply. "That is Flackelholm? How beautiful and still it looks. How pure and white."

He laughed shortly. "It must be horribly desolate and dreary there. But I am sorry that I have not been able to visit it this time either. I have never been there; mother won't let me!"

"Your poor mother!"

They were both silent.

"Father spent more than ten thousand marks there in trenches and dams, and the two huts where the workmen lived are still there. But nothing was done after his death. No one wanted to hear any more of Flackelholm."

"How still and white it lies there! One could believe the sun loved it. He has gone so close!"

"Very few people know the way there. The sturgeon-fishers from the Elbe anchor near it sometimes; it is difficult to land, and there is nothing to find when you do except sea-gulls' eggs or a piece of wreckage or a dead seal."

"Or a — dead person!"

"You can get there on foot when the tide is low, but it is a dangerous way and very long. That was how my father died."

"Are there only barren dunes?"

"No. In the shelter of the dunes there is a smooth, low 'foreland,' many acres, they say, and the land is always growing. When I come back I am going to see. They do say that it's all salty and marshy, that no animal could feed there, and the whole island is worthless. And it must be frightfully wearisome."

"But Andrees, I think if one were sick at heart, sad, or bitter, or unhappy; if one had suffered a great wrong or brought misfortune upon oneself, then it would be good to go there."

He shrugged his shoulders and let her arm go. "I can't imagine it," he said.

"Oh," she went on, "there is so much misery and wretchedness in the world. Some one is always ill in Eschenwinkel. Schütt's little boy has a bad fever, and the room is so low and damp. And Reimer Witt's wife is ill again. And they have six children."

He unclasped his arm from her shoulders. He looked displeased. She saw that she had hurt his feelings and tried to atone for it.

"Who knows the way to Flackelholm?"

He laughed shortly. "Your friend, Antje Witt and her brother Reimer! Weren't you aware of that? They know it. They say that when it is ebb-tide Antje Witt goes out and wanders for hours through the Watt, making a wide circuit round the Priel, and gets to Flackelholm that way. It is a fact that she sometimes goes out with the water, and does not come back with it. And where else can she stay? She must find land somewhere? But it is a daring thing to do. I have measured it on the map, and it is a quarter of the way to Heligoland."

"It is wonderful: A whole country that nobody knows."

"Come," he said. "Let us speak of something else! What do I care about that desert island? It is lovely here, and the whole world lies before me." And as if he wished to get once more a complete image of his home, he looked across the heath and said again, "To-morrow I am going into the world."

He was not looking at her nor thinking of her. It seemed as if he had forgotten her.

Then she thought: "He is glad that he is going away." And she wondered sadly what it was that was so different in them and divided them. She could not understand.

A cart-track went obliquely across the heath leading to the Strandigerhof. They followed it. Each walked in one of the ruts; between them there ran the low wall of earth, overgrown with tall heather. In the same way their thoughts ran side by side, but like the wagon-ruts they never met.

The sun was about to descend into the sea; the red light began to glow behind the scattered clouds; then Heim Heiderieter came from the north across the heath. Ingeborg walked beside him, swinging her brown straw hat in her hand and kicking lazily at the heather. She went along happily and idly. Did Ingeborg Landt trouble herself in those days about any-

thing at all? Did she not live without thought or care? Like a swallow or a sea-gull? Was she not like a thistle, slender and beautiful, stately and tall? Or a wild bee on the heath? As Heim knew well, she was.

When Maria crossed the heath she would often stand still in sudden terror, thinking she saw a snake creeping through the heather, and would go on timidly. But Ingeborg would kick the heather and say, "Get away or keep close!" She paid no attention to snakes. She walked like a young queen through her kingdom. Her eyes were full of clear, pure light; she wore a dress of bright blue with small white spots; it fitted her closely and yet modestly, keeping away Heim's eyes, which were foolish at times. She went meditatively somewhat in front, then she turned round and looked at Heim.

Still and solemn, as if awaiting their visit, the wood stood before them; here and there white birch-trees seemed to have stepped out at the door to meet them. The wood wears a bright, finely embroidered robe, modest, and not too low. Only there in the hollow where the bright-eyed brook lurks among the leaves, the dress is raised a little and the foot shows free. For the wood is advancing across the heath slowly towards the west. Before it there is a tangled undergrowth of young oak-trees, fern and heather, which seem to lie like children at its feet; then there come the first beech-trees, and their boughs stretch low down, making a green veil to cover the mysteries of the wood.

Before everything there stand here and there, among the heather, white slender birches. The west wind is always blowing against them, and they lean back, but they hold fast to their loose feathery caps, and keep watch before the wood by ones and twos and threes.

The Wodanishill stands there; it rises up before the wood, not high, only about twenty feet and perfectly round. The tiny short-legged elves of the woodland have built it so that they can look across the heath from its summit and on above the sea, and further still, very far, as far as only a wood elf can ever see. They have planted the birch-trees too, and they climb up and sit and watch if the clouds are coming over the sea and bringing bad weather. Then they run shrieking and groaning the whole length of the wood and announce what is coming.

"Keep your roots fast, let your trunk bend, keep your leaves firm."

The first gust comes, roaring and howling, and the elf rushes screaming under the gnarled roots.

But when the sun shines as it does to-day and a soft wind blows, then they sit in groups of eight or nine — for they are tiny creatures — on the grassy seat which they have made, and they talk of old days, and the lovers who went last Sunday through the wood, and of Heim Heiderieter's two golden bracelets that are still lying under the turf.

"Quick, away! there comes Heim Heiderieter to disturb us, and beautiful Ingeborg."

"Don't speak so loud, Ingeborg; the air is so clear and still. It sounds farther than you think. Don't strike your hand through the air; it would ring as if you were striking glass. And if you want to sing it must be something serious and beautiful; for it will sound up to the gates where the angels stand."

Ingeborg turned round and looked at him doubtfully. "Yes — you are off again now. Now one won't get another sensible word from you."

They went together up the hill. He saw the movement of her knees beneath her dress.

"A king is buried here."

"Are you sure of that?"

He lay in the grass and looked up at her. "Of course I know it; I am a Sonntagskind."<sup>1</sup>

"Have you composed anything lately? You told me you had. Will you recite it?"

"Perhaps! If you will be kind."

"Is it sensible?"

"I don't know. No one has heard it yet."

"That's only as it ought to be. Say it."

#### "ON THE WODANSHILL

"There was a prince on the North Sea strand,

A castle he had on the heathy land.

He said: We will hunt together,

Heigho — in the autumn weather.

<sup>1</sup>Some one born on Sunday, and therefore especially favoured by fortune.

“ They hunted then for three days through,  
And much fair sport did they light on too,  
Then back to the castle they went again,  
Heigho — in a joyous train.

“ The prince remained in the wood behind.  
‘ May Wodan give the right game — be kind.  
I must stay alone in my sorrow,  
And dream in the wood till to-morrow.’

“ He dreamt until he fell asleep,  
And the frog called out from the woodland deep;  
And in the mist came maidens dim  
And stole his heart away from him.

“ Upon his grave by the green woodside  
No rest can ever my heart betide;  
I seek for something strange and rare,  
And dream of a lovely image there.”

“ That is above my head,” she said, but he saw that she had understood something of it, as much as some one might understand of a cloud that passes far above. Her mouth was slightly open and her breast heaved with a slow, deep movement. If he could only know what she was thinking of. But she was always like a bird! you think it is in the snare and then suddenly it is singing on the next tree as if there were neither fox nor bird catcher.

“ What do you see there, Ingeborg?”

“ Can’t you see? Have you no eyes? There are Andrees and Maria. He has not asked me once to go out with him. But I don’t care.”

Was it true she didn’t?

“ Andrees loves Maria; that is why he goes out with her; and I love you. There.”

“ What? Love? Love? What is that?”

“ It is really true, Ingeborg. Couldn’t you — ?”

“ I could — perhaps. But I won’t. It’s nonsense.”

“ I do think,” said Heim, and his eyes were very angry, “ that you might be a little kinder to me — on the last day.”

“ And I — I wish you would stop begging. Andrees would

never dream of doing that, begging and running after a girl — but you are so silly."

She sprang up and went down the hill to the Strandigerhof, holding her head proudly and swinging her hat to and fro.

Heim stood and looked after her.

Ingeborg went over the heath and thought of Andrees. Andrees was the proudest and most splendid person upon earth. He was splendid like the people about whom Frisius had been teaching her the last few weeks: Theodor Körner, Friedrich Friesen, and the other young heroes of the war against Napoleon. He was so handsome, so true, and he had such proud eyes; and it grieved her that he did not notice Ingeborg Landt. But Heim? No, Heim was too gentle, too weak, too amiable. Heim was no hero.

Heim stood awhile and looked after her. Then he thrust his hands in his pockets, and gazed at the sunset which shone gloriously in the sky. That held him captive. His face lost its strained and anxious expression and his eyes took fire. He forgot Ingeborg, who was crossing to the side of the heath, and he began to talk with that other one who lived in his imagination, who rode over the heath with him, and who loved him as he loved her. He walked on quickly, and as he went, his eyes fixed on the sunset, he raised his hand and everything else in the world disappeared.

"The whole castle is in flames, Ingeborg. Gallop! and don't be afraid. Do you see? The walls are as grey as clouds, and so strong and proud. They will never fall. But inside it is full of flames. They look out from all the windows with their wild red eyes, they run along the passages, step out on the balconies and climb up the tower. Do you see? Now the red cock is flying on the roof. Be careful of the road, Ingeborg, and hold the bridle fast. Do you see the fire in the beautiful hall? The red fire spirits are leaping and sparkling over tables and beds. Don't cry, Ingeborg. We will build a new house, much more beautiful, with a balcony looking towards the wood and high windows to the sea. Now the light sinks — the fires are going out — hollow eyes look at me — ah! it is a ruin now."

He let his arms sink and stood still and desolate. Close by lay the Heidehof and behind the earth-wall Ingeborg was stretched out full length laughing. He was taken aback and

about to turn away in anger, but as she lay there, laughing at him so mockingly, her bright hair mingled with the dark heather, he could not tear himself away. He stood before her and thought: "If only she would love me." And she liked to be looked at, since he did not worry her by talking to her, and lay and stretched herself like a kitten at play. Then he turned away quietly; he had grown almost pale, and she rose at once and went down the hill with him. Twilight already covered the March and the sea.

"I do like you, after all," she said suddenly, "or else I should not always be going over the heath with you."

"But then you get unkind all at once and begin to quarrel."

"Didn't I wait for you by the wall?"

"Yes, you did, and so—and because—" and he put his hands in his pockets and felt there and looked at her; but her eyes had grown once again so large and surprised—such eyes—as if she suddenly saw an elephant before her. Then he gave it up. He returned alone and, as he crossed the Wehl, he took the bracelet out of his pocket and, with a sudden angry movement, threw it into the water. Silver light appeared, and from out of the water the hands of the mermaids grasped eagerly for the jewel.

Shortsighted creatures!

"Nothing will ever come of it," said Heim. "She is too wilful. And she is so different from me."

## CHAPTER IV.

**HEIM HEIDERIETER**, a student of philosophy in his ninth semester, had arrived that morning at Bebenhausen, had dreamt away the day in the beautiful quiet castle, that royal hermitage, and had wandered the whole afternoon through the Schönbuch, dreaming the same dream. Now he went along the quiet wood-paths, up and down hill, on the road which the beech-trees cover with their boughs. At length he was descending the last hill; he was tired, his face was hot, and his shoes were covered with white dust. The beech-trees stepped to one side, the fairy-tales and dreams retired into the wood, and the world opened out: there stood the castle of Tübingen. The evening sun shone in the long rows of windows. The old town lay there peacefully, in the wide warm nest of the valley.

Heim Heiderieter went down slowly. He was still dreaming. No one had been able either to waken or rouse him. It was his home that roused him finally.

He was dressed very simply in coarse material of brown wool, he had a soft hat on his curly, fair hair, and carried a strong oaken stick. In the lapse of time his face had grown manly, it showed a cheerful temper, and was sunburnt and strong. His eyes had remained the same; they were true, pure eyes, shining with all kinds of bright thoughts, like the windows of a house with a lighted Christmas tree behind. But it was just there that Heim Heiderieter's fault lay. It is not always Christmas Eve. When will your working days begin, Heim Heiderieter?

In the market, close by the church, there stands an inn more than two hundred years old. He enters there. The large, low room, with its homely tables and benches and chairs, is full of students; they are taking their simple supper of bread and cheese, or else sitting behind beer-jugs and wine-glasses, talking loudly and cheerfully. Those who frequent this inn are for the most part from North Germany. You see many strong,

bright young fellows. Some are still very young, they have just come from the schools; their faces are pale from the strain of their examination work, and they are still more or less at a loss and bewildered by the free student life. Others are already older, with strongly marked moustaches, and here and there a short, fair beard which they are proud of, though it gives occasion for many harmless jests. But some of the older ones are already *blasé*, they have grown bitter, and are lost to the *alma mater*, children come to grief under her very eyes; they have faces which speak either of sleep or drink, figures either too thin or too stout; their bearing shows either idleness or coarseness. They are a source of jest to the happy youths round them, a burden to their acquaintances and their student clubs. To their parents and brothers and sisters they are a cause of anguish and heavy grief.

Heim Heiderieter hangs his hat on the stick with the bent handle, places them both in the corner, smooths his small beard on one side, and draws himself up till he almost reaches the ceiling. He goes through the room, giving a greeting here and a bow there — his greetings are from the heart, and every time there is a warm light in his eyes, but he bows awkwardly — he steers his way among the tables to that of the Holsteiners.

“See, there comes the dreamer. Sit down, Heiderieter.”

“Heidereisser, woodwalker! Here.”

“No, here! There is only a heath between us.”

This was said by a medical student in his last session; a handsome, cheerful fellow, with bright eyes behind bright spectacles. His father is a doctor also, and comes on his rounds as far as Eschenwinkel, and the son has known the Heidehof from the time when Heim went barefoot over the Sandway to school.

“Do you know, Heim, that your palace in the vineyard is burnt down.”

“Completely! Nothing left but ashes!” Heim laughed pleasantly. “If only Uhland’s poems are saved!”

“All burnt!”

“But I have them in my pocket. See.” He points laughingly to the well-worn volume.

“Tell us, Heiderieter,” asks a slightly elder student who has just come to Tübingen, a law student with a sharp face; “tell us what faculty you belong to.”

There is some mischief in the question and some interest. The whole table laughs. They all want to say something either mocking or witty, and there is a struggle to speak first. Some say "the fifth."<sup>1</sup> Others think that Heiderieter belongs to "Faculty Uhland," and that the whole of Würtemberg is his lecture-room. Last of all, one exclaims that Heiderieter is too seldom in Tübingen for such a question to be warrantable.

In the uproar which has arisen the medical student with kind eyes finds an opportunity to explain quietly to the questioner that Heiderieter is a very attractive but strange young fellow who, unfortunately, does not know what he wants to do.

Heim is distressed by being made the centre of interest, and feels shy. Alone with his thoughts he has great courage; in imagination he can address whole crowds of people, and has talked at great length in the Reichstag. In the company of one or two whom he knows well he is a delightful companion; he opens his heart wide and offers every one a place with such genuine hospitality that they enter in all cheerfulness. But if he is surrounded by half a dozen people, and they look at him, he is shy, and on the rare occasions when he does enter a lecture-room he always goes first, so that no one may stare at him when he comes in at the door. So it happens that Heim Heiderieter appears to individual people as thoughtful, sincere, and really gifted, but to his acquaintance as a whole he is a subject for good-natured jesting, while some few contemptuous and scornful people shake their heads over him.

This time a strong hand rescued him in his trouble.

A young stranger had entered the room; he had a proud figure, smooth, dark hair, dark eyes and fine features; he was well dressed also, and everything combined to give him a distinguished appearance. He stood for awhile in the midst of the room, calm and self-contained, his hat in his hand, looking round him. Then he heard the conversation at the Holsteiners' table, and laid his hand on Heim's shoulder.

"Good evening, Heim Heiderieter!"

Heim sprang up and flung both arms round the other's shoulders.

"Andrees, Andrees!"

<sup>1</sup> There are only "four" faculties.

"Come," said Andrees. "It was only yesterday in Berlin that I laid aside my uniform; and I came here at once to see you and have a talk. It was hard to find Tübingen. In Stuttgart I almost gave it up. It was harder still to find you." He turned to the table. "You have had him for five years. I have an old right to him; let me have him this evening."

Outside it was twilight, almost night, but the sky was clear. It was a quiet, lovely summer evening.

"Where do you live?" asked Andrees.

"Out there," said Heim, somewhat deprecatingly. "I have rented a little house with a garden in the vineyard. But we could go into your inn. Where are you staying?"

"Thank you, I will go with you."

They went up the hill by the narrow, rough steps. The moon shone over the distant trees; its rays threw the crisp shadows of the vine leaves on the path. Every now and then there showed the outline of a bunch of grapes, finely and clearly marked. The bunches were still green.

Heim looked thoughtfully down on the path; Andrees, in his old way, held his head high and looked round; but his movements were not so tranquil as they used to be; there was something hasty and jerky in them.

They were both silent. Here and there shy bird voices called good night to one another. Then the vines receded to the left of the path, and an old square garden house stood before them on a narrow platform, the door open. There was a single room, and that not a large one. The side opposite the door was occupied by a wooden bench painted green; it was upholstered, and apparently served as a bed. By the right-hand wall stood a chest, which Andrees immediately recognized. It used to stand in the big room at the Heidehof. The remainder of the room was occupied by a round table. When the inhabitant of this country house had more than three guests at a time, he had to take his three books from their place on the chest and put them on the table. Of these three books one undertook to introduce the industrious reader to comparative philology, the second was a diary, the third Uhland's poems. The first he had not even looked at, the second had only blank white pages, and had been used as a stand for the spirit-lamp, but the third Heim knew by heart.

Strandiger shook his head as he looked round. "Can you give me a cup of coffee or something of the kind?"

"Immediately," said Heim, and placed the little spirit-lamp on the red table-cloth.

Andrees watched his awkward movements. The flame blew underneath.

"Is the cloth fireproof?"

"The lamp usually stands on the chest," said Heim, and looked inside the chest for the twisted paper which held his coffee.

"The cloth is burning!"

Heim turned round and pushed the lamp with his flat hand, but so vigorously that, instead of moving as he had intended to one side, kettle and water and all flew to the ground. The spirit ran out, burning as it went. It burnt in two places at once and Heim stood between them.

"If you are going to let it burn," said Andrees, "you had better go out very carefully."

Then Heim recovered and struck the burning cloth with both hands. He soon mastered the other fire.

"Come," said Andrees, "we will sit outside on the bench; the moon is rising over the valley. This is a beautiful country. . . . Have you anything to drink?"

"A decanter of wine."

"Well, come."

They sat outside on the bench, with the wine between them. Now and then they took a drink. There was no glass to be found.

"It is five years since we met," said Andrees. "How far have you got?"

Heim rested his elbows on his knees, and looked over the wide valley. He had bright, curly hair and beard, and large, strong features; as he looked keenly and yet dreamily towards the south, where the moonbeams pierced the darkness, he seemed like one of the old German adventurers who used to look southward from those heights, eager to set out on their journeys, longing for strange countries unknown to them, and, when known, productive of many sorrows.

"How far have I got?" he asked in distress. "I don't even know yet where I am going."

"Then permit me one question, my boy: How much has your father left you?"

"I live very simply; the Heidehof can still support me."

"Do you think. . . . Well, no matter. Surely you mean to do something? How do you spend your time?"

"I read. . . . I walk about."

Andrees laughed impatiently. "I have two letters," he said; "one from Maria Landt and one from Telsche Spicker. Aren't you curious?"

"I can guess what is in Telsche's letter."

"Can you? Then I hardly need to say it. She writes: 'The money-box will still provide you with money for another six months; but the Heidehof is mortgaged to the very chimney, and even the chimney is tottering.'

Heim bit his lips, but he did not turn his eyes from the valley.

"Then I must begin to do something."

"Pass your examinations?"

"I can't. . . . What examinations?"

"You ought to know that best yourself. But I'm quite able to believe that you can't. No Heiderieter ever passed an examination or finished anything. My advice is: Go home and take over the Heiderhof."

"Never! thank you. I will find something — somewhere in the world! I will go abroad."

"Maria Landt also writes to you."

"Does she sing the same song?"

"But in another key. I have put the letter on the table for you. You can read it later."

They were both silent for a time. Their thoughts were at home.

"Tell me, Andrees, how are you getting on with Maria Landt?"

"With Maria? She writes very nice letters. In the first line she says: 'Your mother is growing old, and is almost blind.' In the second line: 'The houses in Eschenwinkel will fall to-morrow.' Then there is my mother again, and then Eschenwinkel."

"You have not been at home for five years either?"

Andrees shrugged his shoulders. "What could I do there? I went there once, three years ago. Maria was away. I am not

adapted for such narrow surroundings. I belong to the city. But I will tell you something, my boy: You ought to manage your own little estate like your fathers. You belong to the homeland."

Heim grew restless, and wanted to get up.

"Be quiet! It's not that I think little of you. You know that. But I have always known it would happen. The Heiderieters do no good away from home. If you come to anything it will be in your home, between the wood and the sea. Your place is there. It is best both for your heart and your future. And then you can perhaps make something out of what you have seen and learnt away."

Heim stood up, advanced some steps, and looked across the valley. Misty clouds of dew seemed to roll down into the valley from all the hills.

"I cannot leave this beautiful gentle land," he said, in low tones. "It is too desolate up there, and too cold. The people and the country are alike; it is so flat, so tedious, so vast."

He turned round. "Why do you not go home?"

"I? I belong to the city." Andrees laughed. "To think of Maria Landt, that slow quiet saint. That I loved her then! But it is like that. When you can see and have nothing else, then you want what is there. Do you remember my cousin, Franz Strandiger's sister?"

Heim shook his head. "Where is Franz?"

"He is going to be a farmer. He found the office stool too hard, and the room too narrow; he is somewhere in East Prussia on an estate. . . . But this Lena Strandiger, his sister; I should like her and Maria Landt to meet some time. That would be a good joke. There could not be greater contrasts."

Heim looked at his friend, and in the moonlight he saw plainly what he had felt from the tone of his voice; that Andrees Strandiger regarded everything with different eyes. They were still proud, beautiful eyes, but they were no longer peaceful or pure. That gave him a pang; he reflected that he was quite alone in the world now.

"I have no friend now."

He grew very still.

"I am thinking," said Andrees, "of letting the Strandigerhof. The women could live in the upper floor and not be wor-

ried with the management. Then I could stay in Berlin and see the world. What else is money good for?"

Heim said nothing. He had not thought over these things. "What is money good for? To enjoy life! Certainly; that is why you have money, and land, and people! If I only had money!" He tore himself away from these thoughts.

"How long are you staying here?"

"Lena is with her mother in Stuttgart. We are going on to Switzerland to-morrow."

Andrees rose. Heim got up too.

"I made this excursion to you to bring you Maria's letter, and to impress upon you: Go back to the Heidehof. That is your place."

"Never," said Heim, and shook his curly head defiantly. "Shall I go back home so deserted and lonely? I will go into the world."

Andrees gave him his hand. "You are your own master. Do what you will. I must go. I can find my way to the town alone. Don't they say in the country here: God keep you? God keep you, Heim!"

Heim still held his hand fast. He wanted to say, "Stay a little with me. We have been good friends from childhood." But Andrees turned away, and again, with a last glance, Heim recognized the stranger in his friend's eyes. He let his hand go. He stood awhile before the door and listened to the steps; coming always from a lower level they sounded farther and farther: tipp, tapp. Now they were silent. Everything was still.

"Well, that is done with — quite done with."

He shook his head in bewilderment, looked across the valley, turned round and stepped back into his little cottage, torn by conflicting emotions.

To go out into the world like that! A traveller, without a home!

Then he saw the letter lying on the table, and snatched at something well-known and dear. He stepped outside again and tried to read it in the white moonlight which filled the whole air. It contained a photograph some hand's breadth in size, and on the back was written: "Mother Strandiger says the Heiderieters have always loved strange countries and despised their home; but I should not have thought it of Heim.

If we were all Heiderieters the whole country would be full of thorns and thistles, and there would be no houses built. The heath has come up to the window and grown on the roof. The Heidehof will call in vain for its son and the heath for its master till a useless man returns, worth nothing to his home.

Heim turned the picture round.

“The Heidehof! The Heidehof!” He saw it plainly in the moonlight. He stepped on one side in the very midst of the rays, so that the vines could not rob him of one thread of the silver light.

“The Heidehof! Really — No! The Heidehof! — No! — But see — ”

He was speaking to the vines; he spoke loudly, like some one addressing gaily assembled guests! “See! Yes, the panes in the gable are broken — those dreadful bandits of boys have done that. That has been a legacy from the time when I began it. It is a splendid throw for a boy! The one who aimed best got a broken pipe. I really think I can see Telsche Spieker’s face behind the panes in the big room. She scolded us. But we sat behind the wall and laughed.”

He shook his head in wonder. The moonlight surrounded every hair and played round every lock.

“I have been too tall for a long time to go through the door — far too tall. I shall have to bend, really to bend down when I come back. I — should like to see the old house again to see how it looks — the big room, and the kitchen with the open hearth, and the black horse beans crackling in the pan — a splendid meal. But there must be pieces of potato among them, and they must be fried in bacon fat, and the west wind must blow over the heath, a really cold, damp west wind. It is a meal for people who live on the shore. There is the path through the garden and there is the hole in the wall. The hole looks dark, the heath is growing there now, no one can get through to visit the wood and the Wodanshill. And under the turf there is the third bracelet. I should like to know who will get it. Two have gone to no purpose! The third time will be the right one! What has become of the bracelet I gave away by the brook — Is her arm as brown still, and are her eyes as clear? That brook — I should like to see it again where I lay down before her, and the place where we said good-bye. Where is she? Where?”

He shook his head and stared with wrinkled brow and gloomy eyes on the picture in his hand; the moonlight shone upon it. It seemed to him that his home gazed at him with its faithful eyes.

"Soon the time will come when the wild geese will fly across the heath in their wedge-shaped line, out in the morning, and back in the evening with their hoarse cries. I have watched for them in vain with my gun. Is it possible that at home what is good and strong in me — and there is something — would come to light, as it will not here? Nature is vast there, and the winds blow freshly, and there are great wide spaces. There one can grow good and strong and happy."

Suddenly a loud, glad cry seemed to break from his heart.

"I . . . will go home . . .," he called aloud. "To-morrow . . . I will go to-morrow."

His eyes were moist, and his voice faltered and stammered in his excitement. He had little sleep that night. His heart was awake, and all the emotions in it centred round this single one: I will go home.

The next day but one he started on foot, what was left of his money in his pocket; he had a black knapsack over his shoulder, which he had bought five years ago at St. Pauli in Hamburg. He wandered for the last time through the Schönbuch. He kept as a rule to the course of the Neckar, but avoided the larger towns. The farther he went the more certain he became that he was on the right road, since all the time he grew happier, more courageous, and more self-confident.

The feeling that he had undertaken something good and decisive gave wings to his soul, made his eyes bright and his steps vigorous. They were days of quiet wandering, of tranquil meditation, of victorious struggles, and the crook of his oaken stick was always round his brown wrist. In these days his home seemed to rise before him, growing continually brighter and clearer, vaster and more beautiful; the reality of life took hold of him, and the dreams were torn away like a veil; he composed verses, which he wrote down every evening with a pencil in his black-bound pocketbook. We give them here to show his feeling —

## THE THREE COMRADES

### HOMEWARDS

Fair breaks the morning glow;  
 The dear sun rises with the day  
 To shine upon me on my way.  
 And up the hills I go.

How fast the swift hours flow.  
 The sun is shining far and wide,  
 His beams are hot on the roadside,  
 And up the hills I go.

The summit rises fair.  
 Below the beeches will I stand  
 And look to mine own dear land,  
 But it is not there.

I thought I saw right through  
 Where the church and its small tower are;  
 But my eyes ache from looking afar,  
 And have I wept too?

But the sun sinks low,  
 The angels stand at the heavens' door,  
 Watching the wand'rer from the bright floor,  
 And down the hills I go.

Other verses were written in a different style, for his courage grew.

### UNDER THE LINDEN

I sit under the linden dreaming,  
 Out of the twigs there rustles downward,  
 Down at my feet there,  
 A leaf that is withered.

I grow sad; the summer in splendour,  
 Unripe and green the corn on the meadow,  
 And yet this dead thing  
 Down at my feet there?

And yet again, lo! a rustle downward  
 Light through the air. And on the earth standing,  
 As if it were flung there,  
 A small bright bird

Stands, balances its tail and turns round  
Daintily, gently, bends its head down ;  
Has bright eyes sparkling,  
A throat of crimson.

Then I lean backward, quiet and happy,  
Green is the corn and long is the summer,  
And the bright little birds ;  
Yes — I will catch them.

On the third day of his journey he intended to leave the Neckar and go across to Würzburg. Then he heard that Heidelberg was preparing next day to celebrate its five hundredth anniversary. He decided that he would keep to the friendly river as far as Heidelberg, and then strike due north.

On the way, on the beautiful Thalstrasse, he met many happy bands of students, riding past in wagons covered with garlands, with flags waving. He kept to himself, but exchanged happy greetings. Early on the next morning he rested in an inn, an hour from Heidelberg. The great sunny room was thronged with guests. He was tired when he sat down, and his thoughts were at home, so he forgot himself, and ordered his bread and cheese and wine in Low German.

On one side of him sat two bright girls, their shoes as dusty as his own. Their father accompanied them, a tall, grave man, wearing knickerbockers, with a clever face and a short, dark beard. When they heard the strange speech, which they did not understand, they put their dark heads and warm brown cheeks together ; they discussed who he was and where he could be going, and thought from his fair hair and broad speech that he must come from the North, that he was a Dutchman or a Dane, and they turned their heads to look at him, and seemed desirous to have a pleasant adventure even before reaching Heidelberg. The old man regarded them gravely, drunk his new wine with pleasure, as if he were enjoying something good, and the reckoning were but a trifle.

In the meanwhile Heim was kindled by the light of their happy eyes. When the old man chanced to go out — because a string of foals was driven past — he held his full glass towards the girls, and said, laughing and nodding, "Drink," and they both sipped daintily and giggled, and hid their eyes

in their girlish fashion and looked at each other and laughed, and did not forget to look at him. And since they spoke different languages they all three found it a good joke to talk with their eyes. Afterwards, when he rose to go, he came across the smaller one in a half-lighted passage, and they might have come to a still closer conversation if he had not forgotten himself and spoken suddenly in the Swabian tongue, and if the other girl had not appeared at the far end of the passage. Then they both laughed shyly, and went back to the inner room.

So he went on, pleased with the little adventure, and developing it in his imagination in every possible way, in the past and in the future—like a true castle in the air, with high, giddy arches, elaborate carving, and a hall decorated with gold for himself and the two pretty girls.

But as he approached Heidelberg he stopped thinking and dreaming. His soul seemed to rise up and place itself at its clearest window to look abroad. He who had been a dreamer on the lonely, quiet wood paths had now become a keen-sighted spectator. Heidelberg was the stage, and its inhabitants the actors. And what a great sunny stage, and what fine venerable scenery, and what happy actors! These old winding streets, these old gabled houses, these happy people in peasant costume, these fresh young students, their eyes and cheeks glowing with happiness and wine! And looking down on it all, with its soul-stirring gravity, its empty windows, its noble lines, stood the castle, like a splendid grey-haired old man, his bright eyes put out by fierce enemies. And higher still, above the castle, above the whole of the genuine German landscape, stood the German sun.

Heim Heiderieter went wherever there was most to see. His round hat was pushed far back, he leaned his hands on his stick, which he planted on the ground before him, and he saw the bright processions pass by him, his face turned towards the castle which stood on the mountain, high above the houses.

Of all those who saw the festival on that brilliant day no one was more deeply moved, more completely enchanted, than this homely student who, for the first time, beheld as realities all those things which had haunted his imagination from childhood. When they had all passed by, the bright-coloured figures of German history and the tide of pure gladness and fresh over-

flowing life poured through the streets, then he looked up and greeted the ruin —

“ If you had only eyes to see your children’s happiness ! ”

As twilight fell hunger seized him. Since morning, when he had taken some bread and wine outside the town, he had not thought of eating or drinking. Cheerful music, and the happy sound of voices and glasses, led him to a garden restaurant. He sat down at a table by himself and ordered supper. When he had taken enough he leaned back happily and looked round with still unwearied eyes. At the next table there sat some strangers; by their manner of speech they seemed to be from Middle Germany. They were comfortable, well-dressed people of middle age — men and women who were talking over their impressions of the festival.

In the front of the garden lights were burning, but behind, farther back, there was darkness, only a little broken by moon and starlight, and there, at a long table, sat a company of young people of both sexes. They had all taken part in the procession, and they wore their costumes still. They had heavy broad-brimmed hats, heavy bright-coloured garments, embroidered in gold. The men had swords, and the women broad gold borders on their dresses. They were talking gladly and brightly. The moonlight shone above them through the trees, and the whole made a picture which Heim Heiderieter surveyed long and quietly, and with most obvious delight. It was not long before they perceived him looking at them. They were very happy; they sympathized with his loneliness; they saw with what contentment and pleasure he watched them, and the women were pleased by his stately young strength and his bright face with the curly hair and beard; so, after a short discussion, they sent the youngest, who was dressed very elaborately like an old-time soldier, across to the stranger, at the same time beckoning to him with hands and jugs and glasses. Then Heim went across and sat down among them and was, thanks to the festive feeling which had seized upon him, as happy as any, and they were all pleased to see his beaming face lit by the moon.

Opposite him sat a woman; she was splendidly attired as a citizen’s wife belonging to the period of the University’s foundation. She had an under-dress of blue silk and a broad, bright upper robe trimmed with gold braid. The tall cap worn in the procession she had found tiresome in the evening; in its

place she wore round her head a light handkerchief shining with bright Turkish colours. You could have imagined that this handkerchief had been brought over at the time of the Crusades, discovered at the bottom of some oaken trunk, and brought out in honour of the day. She seemed to take a pleasure in continuing her part, spoke in stiff, old-fashioned terms of speech, and hid her features by drawing her handkerchief forward, so that its shadow fell over her eyes and brow. She had a tall, full, very stately figure, and she wore her splendid attire with all the confidence and the magnificent yet easy bearing which suited it. Beside her sat her partner, with a splendid plume of silver and gold, and a dark cap, but he could not look as she did. He did his best to hold himself upright and to assume a stately bearing, but all his endeavours could not prevent his figure from being short and fat and commonplace. Beside his regal companion he played a subordinate, almost a comic part. The others did not pay much attention to Heim Heiderieter, and he looked across at her whenever he thought that she was engaged in conversation and would not notice his glance. He saw that she observed him, but he was very far from venturing to address this magnificent lady who looked at him with her dark eyes from under frowning brows.

Then it happened that one-half of the company turned aside, engaged in a specially lively conversation; the others in the opposite direction. Then the proud lady laid both arms on the table and asked in low tones, and yet with a voice which showed interest and perhaps mischief —

“ May I ask the stranger where his home is? ”

He looked at her with his deep, sparkling eyes, and replied in the same tone —

“ I can see the sea from my house.”

She bent farther forward and asked quickly —

“ The North Sea? ”

“ Yes,” he said; “ to the east is the heath, and to the west the North Sea.”

“ Heath and sea! How lovely! But no wood — no wood at all? ”

He thought he heard her voice tremble, but he could only catch the faint outline of her face and a dark gleam of her eyes now and then when she turned her head sideways in speaking.

“ There is a wood too,” he said, “ on the edge of the heath.”

"But no hills — no brooks? I mean to say — "

He smiled and answered, "We have a brook too, but it is very small."

"With moss on the sides and silver white sand at the bottom? That is charming."

"Yes, it has," he said happily.

She was quiet for awhile. He waited for another question. He liked to hear her soft, deep voice, and the refined speech of the country from such a mouth. But she sat thoughtfully without moving. Her hand was fixed firmly on the tall glass in front of her. He glanced at her questioningly. Then she looked up again and gazed at him, and it seemed to him that she wished to search his very soul, she remained so long quiet and motionless. He saw plainly the moist gleam of her eyes.

"Are you going home?" she asked in low tones. "Or are you coming away?"

"I am going there." And in the manner of trustful natures, and eager to give his confidence after his long, lonely wanderings, he said —

"I was living in Tübingen, and suddenly I got homesick and I started out at once, on foot." He looked at his stick and shook it. "And when I get home I am going to be a farmer on my little Heidehof like my fathers."

She was silent for awhile, then she took her hand from the glass, and said, with a light, ringing laugh —

"And it is not the heath alone which draws the stranger home, nor the brook, nor the sea, but the maiden who is to be his bride."

He shook his head laughingly. "The Heidehof will have as much as it can do to support me. I have not grown rich while I have been away, and my home is poor."

"Any one is rich who has a kind heart. What you have seen and learnt while you have been away you must not shut up as so many do, but you must give it out. People must be kind, they must have interests, and then they are rich. Do you know that I saw you this afternoon as we went through the town? You wore your hat much farther back than now, and I was sorry that you did not look at me, but only at the castle. Do you know that is why I got them to call you when I saw you sitting there at the table; I was interested in you, sir."

"You sympathized with me!"

"Yes! I thought 'it is a pity. He looks as if he could be very happy,' and I thought something else, too."

"It has been a lovely day," said Heim enthusiastically. "But the evening has been still more pleasant because of your kindness. Thank you."

The party got up and prepared to go. In the eagerness of conversation the fat patrician did not look for his lady. They remained behind alone.

"You may come with me to the end of the garden," she said. "My cousin has forgotten and left me behind." And looking up at him she said, "You ought to have taken part in the procession to-day. We had not many such figures as yours."

"Where would you have put me?" His courage was growing.

"Where you are now! We should have made a stately couple! Don't you think so? Let us walk like this to the end of the garden."

She laid her arm in his, and he walked beside her. It was the first time in Heim's life that he had given his arm to a lady, and he stepped proudly and confidently, for this was once again life and reality. As long as the others had been there he could not get rid of his shyness, but now he was happy and at ease, the joy of the festival seemed to run like light fire through his veins. It was as if he went arm in arm with the festival itself.

The garden was connected with another road by a leafy avenue, and through this avenue they passed, both silent and both deeply moved. Neither dared to speak; they were each afraid of some word or thought out of accord with the moment, which might appear strange to the other, and tear aside the delicate veil which divided dreamland from the real world.

She remained standing where the avenue ended and the evening lights shone faintly through the leaves. Their hands met.

"Give greetings to your home," she said; "and to the heath and the brook and the Wodanshill and the whole of your youth?"

"How do you know there is a Wodanshill?"

"You mentioned it."

"Don't go away. Give me another hour. I never loved or liked any one as much as you."

"Never?"

"Never. . . . Yes, once a child . . . a long time ago. She, too, belonged to me. She had a heart like yours. But it is a long time ago. Stay with me! All my thoughts cling to you. The moon will guard you."

"I trust you. I trust you for everything good. But I cannot. I must go home. May God keep you."

"I will hold you fast."

"Come here!" And, before he knew what she intended, she drew close to him and kissed him warmly. She thrust him back and stood just behind the gate and said, "I beg you not to think badly of me."

Heim Heiderieter remained leaning on the gate for an hour longer, looking up and down the dark road.

The same night he went northwards, with happy eyes. The farther he went the more plainly did those old images rise up before him which had appeared to him when he was a boy dreaming in the heather. But they had changed. They were no longer strange figures; they neither came out of foreign countries nor went there to do great deeds; they were children of his own country, his home, who tried to serve it, who were sorry for its distress and rejoiced in its happiness. They rode across the heath and built the first huts on its edge, in sight of the sea, and they went down the sloping shore to conquer new land. Dykes were built, and torn in pieces by the howling storm. But they did not despair; they began the laborious work once more, till the green land stretched far into the Watt.

So the wanderer was already at home, dreamt in the heather, wandered through the Watt, and imagined that he had mastered everything poor and weak in his soul.

When, leaving the Harz on his right, he descended towards Hildesheim and saw the wide plain before him, he was seized with impatience. He gave up walking and went north by the railway. He arrived in the town at evening by the last train, and went through the dark streets to the market. Without intending to do so, he turned to the right and stood before the iron railing and looked over the schoolyard to the tall, quiet building, and went thoughtfully on to the market. There on the south side? What is it that runs there with long strides and vanishes in the pitch-dark Papengasse? Heim stands and listens.

"All quiet! That was a boy of the second class! In my time they had trousers which were too short for them. That is changed now. But one thing is the same; he vanished in the very same door where, eight years ago, Heim Heiderieter used to vanish. I will be a harum-scarum for the last time to-night," and Heim followed the boy down the Papengasse.

He kept this joyous feeling of home till long after midnight. Towards morning — it was a still beautiful August night — he passed through his own village. He went with his head bent, his brow furrowed; his stick struck hard upon the stones.

That is the old house. The iron knocker sounded loud against the door.

"Telsche Spieker, wake up! I am here."

"Who is here?"

"Heim Heiderieter."

There was silence for awhile. In the east, over the wood, the dawn appeared slowly; old Pellwormer, the night-watchman, who stammered so badly, was making his last round from the Strandigerhof along the Wehl, and he sang with his beautiful and clear, but somewhat trembling voice —

"The clock has struck four,  
It is four by the clock:

The day drives away the dark night.  
Dear Christians, awake and be bright,  
And praise God the Lord."

**BOOK II.**

一言既出，驷马难追。信言不美，美言不信。信言直，美言曲。

## CHAPTER I.

TELSCHE SPIEKER stepped to the writing-table with the lamp which she had trimmed in the kitchen.

“ Shall I light it? ”

Heim raised his head and looked up from his book with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

“ Light it? ”

“ Don’t look at me so stupidly, Heim! I am not going to light you or even your fine house, only the lamp.”

“ Yes, Telsche, if you wish.”

“ I suppose you have had a long way to come down! What is that old parchment that makes you forget your eyes and ears? You have been a month at home now, staring in that stupid book.”

“ It’s an old church book, Telsche; have some respect for it. Can you imagine that the Watt out there was inhabited once? Houses and churches stood there, Telsche, out there in the Watt, under the great waves. The church must have been just about where Flackelholm lies now—St. Andrew’s Church.”

“ And now,” said Telsche, “ what does the old church under the waves matter to you? Think about the church in the midst of the village. You don’t go there.”

“ I go to church sometimes, Telsche! ”

“ Yes, you do; but I think you go more to see than to hear. To look for Ingeborg Landt, that’s why you go to church! ”

“ That’s a dreadful accusation,” said Heim, and rose slowly and went up to her. He looked at her darkly and severely, but mischief quivered in the corners of his eyes.

She left the room quickly.

Soon after Ingeborg Landt stepped in. Behind her slender figure appeared the smaller, broader shape of Telsche Spieker.

“ Do you see? ” said Telsche. “ He sits and wastes the time like that. In the day he wades through the Watt and in the

evening through these old stupid books. He was only ploughing four or five hours, and he came home at four o'clock. He said he could bear it no more, it was so tedious it drove him out of his mind. His mind! what good is his mind? It's only laziness. And we have still two acres of potatoes in the ground!"

"Where is your man?" said Ingeborg. "The yearling calf has got loose, and the wind is blowing in the stable, and it's cold and wet. Can't you see to your household a little whilst Telsche is in the field with your man? You ought at least to listen when one speaks to you."

"Do you see? Do you see?" said Telsche. "He is reading already!"

"I am not reading, Ingeborg; I was only looking down."

Then Telsche Spieker took the blame upon herself, as she always did when he was scolded.

"Let him alone, Ingeborg! We cannot make him any different. He is like his father. His father took more interest in books than in the cow-stall."

Heim raised his head. "Sensibly spoken, Telsche."

"Yes!" said Ingeborg. "If you would only do something more useful. What have you got there?"

"Dear child!"

"I am not your 'dear child!' What an air he says it with, Telsche!"

"I was going to say that I must first get accustomed to my new life. When one has just come from the university, one cannot spend the whole day among the potatoes."

"When a man has been idle for five whole years, one would think he must be eager to work."

"Dear Ingeborg!"

"Be quiet! What are you working at?"

"I want to understand the history of this neighbourhood, our home, and especially the story of its first settlement."

"I should like to know," said Ingeborg quickly; "what's the good of that. It doesn't matter in the least which dyke was built first, and you know people leave their hobbies till after supper, and on Sunday afternoons."

Heim moved his head to and fro. "Ah, Ingeborg; you ask what good it is. Knowledge is a good in itself."

"Nonsense! If it's no use to me, or my neighbour, it is all

moonshine." She stepped to the writing-table, and turned over carelessly the leaves of the old book. "You must write a history of the country, or —" she said, and looked at him with her great grey eyes as if she saw him for the first time, and was surprised at his appearance. "You are as queer as your hair. I think you could write some sort of a romance, an historical romance. It would certainly have loose ends, but we would cut them off, Frisius, Telsche, and I."

He struck his hand heavily on the table. "Who knows, Ingeborg, what may happen? Digging up the potatoes, you know —"

Then the door opened, and Maria Landt stepped in and said, "Andrees is coming to-morrow."

"Andrees! Andrees!" The two at the writing-table had risen, and looked at her as she appeared in the door.

Maria stepped closer, in her quiet, gentle way; she was a dark beauty with a full form, whilst Ingeborg was taller, and more slender. The little four-year-old Fritz Witt stepped into the room behind.

Ingeborg advanced quickly to meet her. "Has he written to you?"

"Yes, he is coming to-morrow," she said, in her timid way. "He is bringing Franz Strandiger, and his sister and mother with him."

Heim wondered and reflected, but Ingeborg said suddenly, and with all her heart — "I am anxious to see them."

"Heim," said Maria; "I have brought little Fritz with me. He used to be so well, but now he has suddenly got an eruption on his skin. Look!"

She knelt down by the child, and took off his patched coat. Then she raised the shirt from his shoulders. She did it all with a calm expression on her pale face, and with busy hands.

"There! Do you see? It covers nearly his whole back. The housekeeper thinks it is a kind of scurf or dry scab."

"It is certainly scab, Maria."

"Then we must get some ointment, or, rather, we must make some." She looked grave. "It is so sad," she said. "We have doctors and apothecaries enough, but most poor people live in illness and misery because doctors and medicine are too dear. How many could be cured, and become happy and strong. And

now we must play the quack ourselves, however much we dislike it. What do you think, Heim?"

"We must get some tar."

"Yes, I think so too! When Ingeborg was little, she had a scab; we asked a doctor, and he gave us a splendid bright-coloured box; a true apothecaries' box." She shook her dark hair sadly. "It is a topsyturvy world. The State helps doctor to learn how to open the people's eyes, and how to heal sickness. And when they have learnt it, things are so that most people cannot make use of their knowledge because of the wretched money."

"Telsche, the tar bucket!"

Telsche screamed out from the kitchen: "The tar bucket?"

"Now I shall turn black!" said Fritz. The others laughed, but Maria's face remained grave. No one could ever remember to have seen Maria Landt light-hearted. She was always beautiful, quiet and kind, but never gay.

When they had undressed the child, they tarred him. Heim wished to do it.

"You will get black fingers, Maria."

But Fritz had no confidence in him. "You can't do it."

And Maria said: "I will do it myself."

Then they took him to the kitchen to dry near the hearth. Ingeborg had gone out. Maria also made ready to go.

"Will you come with me, Heim? Frau Witt is very ill again."

"The Witts are always in trouble," said Telsche shortly. Telsche could not bear the Witts, especially the wife.

Maria was not listening to her. "She coughs very badly, and there is nothing to be done with Antje. She gets stranger and stranger."

"It's because of her age," said Telsche. "She is forty now."

"She is always talking of Andrees, whom she wants to help her. It's so wretched."

"I will go with you, Maria."

They went together to Reimer Witt's house. It was the first in Eschenwinkel; it stood at the foot of the sand-hills, below the Heidehof. When they came out again Maria was about to shake hands with her companion.

"I will go with you as far as the Strandigerhof."

She walked beside him with her head bent. It was a wet,

misty evening in September. In the half-light he saw the bright water drops on her uncovered dark hair. All the time he had known her she had been an object of fraternal and reverent love to him, and his kind heart would have been glad to help her; but he did not know — no one knew — what it was that weighed upon her. It was no definite trouble that had made her so quiet; she had been so from her childhood. Perhaps her constant intercourse with Frau Strandiger had done something. Ingeborg used to go to Pastor Frisius and Schoolmaster Haller, leaping and running across the heath with her long hair flying behind her; but Maria sat with the quiet woman who had had her eyes blinded and her courage broken in the hours when she had witnessed her husband's death. Maria was as quiet and deep as the water of the Wehl, and as tender and yielding as its willows. She had developed still further in the way Andrees disliked even when they were children.

The west wind, the tired messenger of the Watt, mounted on to the land with its heavy water boots, and went past them, singing lightly to itself. It was a sad song. It sung that Andrees would be still less able to understand Maria Landt now he was coming back.

There was a gap in the willows and a plank bridge to draw water from.

At the time the dyke was broken white mermaids had been driven up into the land, terrified by the storm, thrown up powerless and against their will. They had lifted themselves up to a great height — people had seen them plainly — but still they had been forced over the dyke. And when in the night the wind veered round and drove the water out of the land they could not return. The opening was too narrow, and the mermaid can only swim on high foaming waves. So they remained in the Wehl.

They had terrified many a girl as she stepped out of the willows at twilight to bring water. She would scream and throw the bucket down, and only return in the company of the man she trusted. One girl, as she bent down to draw the water, saw the sad, deathlike face of the mermaid. She was seized with a giddiness and a desire, people say, to embrace the mermaid and weep with her. She fell in and was drowned.

Maria looked through the willows to the water. Her steps

went gropingly to and fro, and it seemed as if she wished to stand still.

Then Heim touched her arm. "You must rouse yourself from these dreams, Maria."

She did not look up, but she went on and seemed to have collected herself, only she bent her head sideways and listened to the whispering and murmuring in the reeds.

"Andrees is coming this evening," said Heim, in low tones.

She bent her head again. "I haven't forgotten. But what I wanted to ask you was: Do you think that Reimer Witt's wife will die?"

"Yes, Maria! You know it. You have seen many sick and dying people though you are so young. You know she must die."

She drew a deep breath and walked more slowly. "She has had no happiness in life, none at all."

"Oh yes, Maria! Her youth, her love, her children. We must be content with a little."

"Some have only laughter and happiness and plenty, and the others — "

"Appearances are often deceitful, Maria. As for the rest, it is God's will."

She shrank together. "That cannot be, Heim. It is certainly not God's will. When God made the world He said, 'It is good.' But now it is good no longer. We can't understand it, and it is hard to bear."

He took her hand. "You must not let yourself have such thoughts, Maria; you are too young, not much over twenty, you have good health, and we all love you. Only think! Ingeborg has gone about among people, has spent many hours with Haller and Frisius, she has gone to the town now and then — we have the station near now — and she has bright eyes, and is happy and can laugh as girls ought to at eighteen or nineteen. But you are always sitting with Aunt Strandiger, who is feeble and depressed and full of sad memories. Come very often to us, Maria; to Haller and Frisius and me."

She shook her head. "I cannot be happy. I think about every one and everything, the sick and the miserable and the dead. I see everything sad, and it is just as if I were not here in myself, but always wandering about to visit people in trouble. I am with Reimer's wife. I hear her voice the whole

night. I think what she thinks. Each one of the children seems to be my special care. I wonder that I do not cough as she does, painfully and convulsively. I think of Andrees too."

"What of him, Maria?"

"Things are not going well, Heim. I know it. His letters to his mother have nothing in them. And he is bringing the others with him. Do you remember the portrait of Lena Strandiger, where she is laughing and showing her white teeth? Hinnerk Elsen has gone to the town to bring them. They will soon be here. What will come of it!"

"It is this wretched weather, cold and wet, which makes you so depressed."

She stood still between the first two elms, immense old trees. "Thank you very much, Heim! I am so glad that you have come back. You have returned just the same as you went away. Go to-morrow to Reimer's wife. Do you hear, Heim? Don't forget. It does her good. You are so cheerful."

He returned slowly and with sad reflections. The wet cold twilight oppressed his heart also.

Maria stood awhile longer. She rested her hand on the tree and looked back to the Wehl. She could see only the bright edge, but she liked to hear the murmur of the little waves among the reeds. She withdrew her hand slowly and unwillingly from the trunk and went back. She bent the wet willow twigs carefully aside, passed under, and stood on the plank bridge. On both sides the upright stems of the reeds stood like men before a gate and put their heads together. "Yes," she said. "It is not as it should be. He has grown proud and harsh. It was in him even then when he was with me."

She sank down on one knee and then sat, leaning sideways, on the wooden stake which supported the bridge. As she sat in that way she forgot the cold and the twilight and brooded and dreamed over her childhood.

Inside the coach, among the soft cushions, sat Andrees, Lena, and Franz. Frau Strandiger, the mother, was to follow in a few days. The windows rattled slightly; a delicate perfume filled the whole interior. Lena Strandiger pressed her fine limbs and her black head back on the cushioned seat and looked at Andrees with half-shut eyes. He gazed straight before him and thought deeply.

Outside on the box, in the mist and damp, sat Hinnerk Elsen and thought, as much as it beffited his position as a man and a coachman to think, of the time when he had played with Andrees in the sand-pits on the edge of the heath or in the mud of the "foreland." His thoughts were all tranquil and peaceful. Hinnerk Elsen had only twice in his life been really roused.

In the coach Franz was talking of the last few years which he had spent as under-steward on an estate in Posen. He accompanied all his explanations with measured significant movements of his close-cropped head. At last he said —

"You, my friend, take no interest in your land. You should let the whole estate. Your steward is growing old, too."

"I have thought of it, Franz. But as long as my mother lives, it would be difficult. She can't imagine anything else but my taking over the house."

"And would you live here then?" asked Lena. "In this lonely place! You! How long do you think you could stand 'it'?"

He looked doubtfully at the speaker, who lay back so carelessly among the cushions.

"Well, I should not need to be always here. I could go away for weeks together."

The brother and sister exchanged glances. The brother's said, "He is obstinate," but his sister's soft dark eyes seemed to say jestingly, "I can manage him easily."

"There are lights outside," said Lena, and raised her head a little.

"It is the village."

After awhile he remarked, "The school is on the right."

Suddenly he turned to the window: "Yes, really! There is Heim Heiderieter sitting at the writing-table with his lamp. How cheerful it looks!"

They went down the sandy hill.

"What houses are those on the right?"

Andrees had to rouse himself from strange dreams. "Ah, you know, Eschenwinkel. They were always writing about the houses."

"I tell you: Let it all."

"See! There is the Wehl! The willows are high."

Maria Landt started up from the bridge. "There he is."

She was thinking only of Andrees. The coach came out between the elms. The gravel grated underneath. Ingeborg stood in the room on the right of the front door — the room meant for the young master. She was leaning her shoulder against the window-frame, the portrait of Lena Strandiger with the white teeth seemed to hover before her, and she looked at it with a furrowed brow and half-closed eyes. She was thinking only of Lena Strandiger. "There she is!"

They sat in the large pleasant parlour opposite the door, Andrees and his mother and Franz and Lena. Ingeborg had appeared for a moment in the entrance hall, and had greeted the guests with a short, proud inclination of her fair head. But when she saw that Frau Strandiger lay weeping in her son's arms, she had hastened up the stairs and not shown herself again. Maria had been summoned to Eschenwinkel.

The arrangements were simple and old-fashioned, but very cheerful. The large, pleasant room had great beams across the ceiling. There was a big, white-tiled stove and three tall windows. Frau Strandiger with her uncertain movements — she was almost blind then — and her black woollen dress was in perfect accord with it all.

"I have left everything as it was, Andrees, outside and in. You are master now. I have gone to the first floor with Maria and Ingeborg. You must rule down here."

They were all silent. Then Andrees said carelessly — "Lena has good taste, mother. She can alter things as she thinks best."

"I suppose it doesn't matter to two thousand marks or so," said Franz, with his short laugh.

"Yes," said Andrees, "I could spare that."

"Maria thought," said Frau Strandiger in her toneless voice, "that you ought to do something first for Eschenwinkel."

Franz gave a short, mocking glance at Andrees and stepped to the window. Immediately after his sister followed him.

"It is tiresome," she said. "More tiresome than I had thought it would be. You can't get a sensible word out of this good lady. If one is blind? And the girls seem to have no manners. I have no desire to tire myself in this dreary house for your sake. I want to leave soon."

"And what will you do then? How will you live? Will

you depend on your uncle, who has supported us as long as we can remember? Wait a fortnight or a month, then he will be tortured by this dreariness and loneliness. Then you can go into the world with him, and I will take over the Strandigerhof. That will be best for us both."

"But your plan has opponents."

"Opponents?" He glanced across the room. Frau Strandiger had gone out, but in the doorway there appeared suddenly two figures, who certainly looked like opponents. One was a tall, fair girl, and the other a strong, vigorous woman of the lower class, about forty, with a dark, sunburnt face, and bright eyes that wavered helplessly in their glance.

"Good evening, Andrees," cried Ingeborg, with her ringing voice; "I have brought Antje Witt. She can't wait any longer to see you."

Antje Witt stood anxiously at the door, looking first to one side and then to the other.

"Now say what you have to say, Antje," Ingeborg admonished.

"Good evening, Andrees, good evening! You know what a misfortune I had — more than twenty years ago?"

"I know," said Andrees; "the day of Gravelotte. Can't you get it out of your head?"

"Yes, Andrees, you look — you look so fine, and I used to nurse you, then, before the war, when I was a servant here. That's what I used to do." And she raised her arms and moved them to and fro like a cradle. "But they tell me I am not quite in my proper mind."

"Ah, Antje!" Ingeborg interrupted, "don't make a long story of it! Of course Andrees is glad to see you. Ask for what you want!"

"Yes, Andrees! — the pastor believes it and Heim as well. That is — I don't know yet if Heinrich really died at Gravelotte. And I can't believe it! He was so strong. He could carry the two hundred pound cask of beans so easily over the plank, and he was quite certain that he would return when the war was over. And since it's not a long distance to go there, only a little way, Heim says, if you could give me the money, you and the parish, then perhaps I could find him or his grave. Or else I should see all the graves, the many thousands of graves which are there, and then Heim thinks that I should

not say any more that he is still alive; and I should not talk to him, and I should be able to sleep. Yesterday, in the Watt, Andrees, I met him. It is really true."

Andrees was going to answer her quietly and kindly. Then he caught the glance which Lena Strandiger directed to him. He knew the eyes and what they said: "You are a village boy, Andrees, and will always remain one."

Ingeborg interrupted. "Go on, Antje! We are all Christians here."

"It is not a suitable time, Ingeborg, as you see. I will bring your request to the notice of the parish, Antje. But I can hardly believe that there is any object in the journey. Heiderieter has such extraordinary ideas."

Ingeborg looked at him with wide-open eyes. "Heim!" she said; "but Maria says so too. She says that Antje must see the battle-field and all the graves."

"Yes," murmured Antje, "I must."

"You said before that you would furnish this room again," cried Ingeborg. "You did not mind to two thousand marks or so. I heard it as I stood in the open door. And you could furnish her mind again for a hundred marks. But as you please! You are the master now. Come, Antje! Don't cry! We will get our pence together. We will collect from the people in Eschenwinkel, and Heim Heiderieter will give us something if he has it."

"He has nothing," sobbed Antje.

"You must not cry. Go in the kitchen."

When she returned to the room Andrees stood before her. "I want to introduce you, Ingeborg Landt."

"I know, Andrees," she said, and tried to be quiet and kind. They stood opposite each other: Ingeborg tall, fair and pale, Lena Strandiger dark and dainty, and much smaller. Franz Strandiger had shaken off his indolence, and looked with great interest in her delicate face, lit by such clear and expressive eyes.

"We are old acquaintances," he said. "How is it we don't see your sister?"

"She is in Eschenwinkel with a sick woman, and hopes you will excuse her till to-morrow."

"Is your sister as tall as you are?"

"By no means," she answered, laughing, "and she is not in

the least like me. She is dark, I am fair; she is yielding, I am obstinate; she is quiet, I am noisy; she is sad, I am happy. I wonder what God thinks of me."

Lena Strandiger laughed. "A very candid picture of yourself, Fräulein Landt!" she said. "And last of all the good God as a critic, I suppose."

"As a critic! Certainly. Everything is in that. What He thinks!"

"What do you think of it, Franz? Would you have Him as a critic? Or you, Andrees?"

Then Ingeborg spoke again, and people always listened to her voice, it was so pure and clear.

"Good night, Andrees! Good night!"

The door had closed lightly behind her. She turned to the stairs, meaning to go up at once. Then she remembered that Antje Witt would be still in the kitchen and would need a word of encouragement. That was Ingeborg's power, to give courage. She seemed to come so near to people.

And she was right! There sat her true friends not far from the warm hearth, Hinnerk Elsen, Antje Witt, her brother Reimer Witt, with the fair hair, who had been out in the 1870, and near him his daughter Anna, the chambermaid. Hinnerk Elsen took his short pipe out of his mouth, drew his watch from his pocket and said with dignity —

"The kitchen clock will strike nine up there."

"Ah! You and your watch! Tell me what you think of the people up-stairs."

The others were silent and a little shy, although they knew Ingeborg's way; but Hinnerk Elsen said thoughtfully —

"I don't know what to think of Andrees. He did not look at his horses. He did not look at me, though I have knocked him in the mud many times when we were boys, and though I have a good bit in the bank, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-five marks now. More I won't say, for it doesn't concern me. But that Franz Strandiger should laugh at Anna Witt as he did in the hall didn't please me at all. That does concern me; for Reimer Witt told me I ought to take care of his daughter. Didn't you, Reimer? Well! and now we must go to bed, the watch says nine."

This was Hinnerk Elsen's verdict and he said no more about it. He stuck his pipe in his inner pocket and went along the

passage to his room. The others rose too. In the passage Ingeborg asked —

“ How is your wife, Reimer? ”

“ She is worse again.”

“ And the doctor? ”

“ I know that he can do no good; and I know that I cannot pay him.”

It sounded so hopeless and so listless. “ I will go to her to-morrow. Heim must go too. We will send food for you and the children.”

“ Maria came at seven o’clock,” he said, “ just after the coach had passed our house. She is going to sit up to-night, though she looks very tired.”

That night, when the three comrades were united for the first time in their old home, the first autumn storm came with the high tide about twelve o’clock.

It flung many dead branches down from the elms of the Strandigerhof, and struck with its harsh fingers on the window in the roof. It was the very window behind which the light had been burning that night, as a signal to the master of the house who was lost in the Watt. The wind blustered among the houses of Eschenwinkel, louder than the coughing of the sick woman. It sprang up the sandy hill and roared, screaming and beating round the Heidehof, so that Telsche, who lay awake, thought that the great door had been blown in, and Heim in his dreams imagined that he was an old Viking, sailing over the raging sea to conquer the land of “ Fame,” which lay a hundred miles beyond Iceland. And everything was grand; only he was tortured by longing for Ingeborg Landt.

## CHAPTER II.

THE next day the mother of Franz and Lena arrived and at once laid claim to Andrees. This Frau Strandiger, since her widowhood, had always worn black; but on her scanty grey hair she wore a neat though stiff little cap with some bright colours. She was slender and fairly tall, had a sharp face, with fine searching eyes and a good, well-shaped nose. In her bearing there was something stiff and upright, in her movements something quick and hungry; and Heim, who was great in far-fetched comparisons, said later to Ingeborg that she was like a woodpecker with a bright helmet and shoulder-straps, hunting for acorns and hazelnuts in the late autumn. Ingeborg knew the woodpecker from her walks through the woods, and had been a housemate now to the lady with the bright cap and the jerky movements; she nodded the completest assent, and her rebellious hair seemed to rejoice with her; the short locks stood out dagger-like round her delicate, pale face with its vivid eyes.

Lena Strandiger's mother had experienced the usual fate of women who excel their husbands intellectually and in strength of will. In her home the people still called her by her maiden name. Before, when she had been the young wife of Lieutenant Strandiger, she had been called "Lena Hobooken," and now, when her hair was almost white, "the old Hobooken." The people are not very ceremonious.

Andrees went arm in arm with his aunt through the two rooms; one was the large, stately parlour, the other the dining-room, small and cheerful, with one window; it held the table where they took meals, and the old dark chest ornamented with twisted columns, which dated from the time of his grandfather. Every time when the two came in sight of the mirror in the corner, they threw a quick glance at it, the old lady to see how she looked beside the handsome youth, and Andrees to glance at Lena, who was sitting on the sofa behind. But when they

entered the second room Andrees looked at the door through which Maria would enter, and his heart beat louder. He had not seen her yet.

"Don't say anything of the past," said the old lady. "You have spent money and enjoyed life. Let us talk of the future. How are you going to settle?"

"I am afraid that I must stay here and take to farming."

"I don't think you have considered it rightly. I know you want to go on leading the same life as before, and you can do so without anxiety if you will follow my advice in two things. First: You must economize in the management of the estate. A great deal can be done in that way."

"For example?"

"Foreign workmen! Break up the whole of Eschenwinkel and make one big building — a workmen's barracks."

"So many of them have served my father!"

"Your father, Andrees — don't be vexed — was much too kind-hearted. So he didn't make money. He was a real Christian! That is . . . I mean to say . . . we are all Christians. But I mean: he really wanted to live like that. He was not content to be a Christian himself, in his own house, by leading a decent life and having prayers at table — there is nothing to be said against such things as that — but he wanted to treat his workmen like a Christian, to buy and sell in a Christian way, and, to put it shortly, to carry on business like a Christian."

Andrees heard her in silence, and then he suddenly gave expression to a feeling of sadness he was hardly conscious of.

"I wish my father had lived longer. Many things might have turned out differently." Since he had returned yesterday he had felt curious emotions; old, forgotten ideas had recurred to him.

She looked up at him quickly and fingered restlessly the gold watch-chain hanging from her shoulders.

"I want to give you a second piece of advice," she said. "Let the Strandigerhof! You are no farmer! Let Franz be your tenant, and come with Lena and me back to Berlin."

That sounded delightful. "With Lena!" "I can't bring myself to do it while mother lives."

"Do you want to waste your life here? You, with your

splendid appearance and your vigorous youth, and your knowledge and your wealth? Why have you got it all?"

And again an old idea recurred: "My father would have said 'to serve the country and the people.'"

"I will think it over, aunt. A great deal depends on Lena. I hope she will like the place and decide to stay here for the present."

As he spoke they had crossed the threshold of the dining-room. Maria Landt stood by the table and leaned her hand heavily on it. They met for the first time since they had stood together at the Wodanshill five years before.

"Maria!" he said. And he could say no more, for her look and appearance shook him so. All at once, as she gazed at him, she seemed to become clear, and vivid, and warm, the same Maria Landt whom he had left five years before, who had so much attracted and yet repulsed him.

He could not let go her hand. He had meant to show just the friendliness and kindness he owed his mother's companion, her nurse for so many years. During his absence he had learnt in a calm, cold household and in superficial society, to think coolly and to act only after tranquil consideration, but now he forgot himself. He, Andrees, the collected, the self-composed, left the old lady standing, seized Maria's other hand, and said quickly and yet with a curious quiver in his voice:

"Come, Maria, I must talk to you. Come with me." And he led her through the door and across the entrance-hall to his room.

And when they stood alone by his writing-table the five years of separation seemed to pass away like a breath, to be sunk in night and forgetfulness by one glance of their eyes. They came together just as they had parted; they were once again as distant and, alas, as near, too, as on the day they had followed the waggon track across the heath.

"Andrees! Don't let the place. Think of your father and your mother, and the people in Eschenwinkel. Don't listen to the others."

"You are jealous."

"No, Andrees. Surely you don't think that of me! You know I should be glad of anything that made you happy. That would be a wretched love!"

He shook his head in bewilderment. "You have loved me all these years with such . . . with such a love?"

"I should so like it if you could stay at home and become like your father. That is why I begged you so to come back. And your mother, she is almost blind."

"Don't say any more. I ought to stay with you, that is what you want. You are just like the others."

She grew a shade paler, and unclasped her hand from his arm.

"If you are happy, Andrees, then I will be happy too. But the road you have been following for years leads to misfortune. In the next few weeks your home must conquer or you will be restless all your life. Away from home you will only waste your time, as Heim was wasting his. I know you, Andrees."

"Don't talk of it."

She held out her hands, and said entreatingly, "You know, Andrees, it is my misfortune that I love you and yet at the same time know we are so different. It is my unhappy destiny that my whole soul clings to you, and yet we cannot understand each other; we have each our own faith, our own love, our own hope, and I can find nowhere where we touch. Yes! when you are silent! When you are silent! But the moment we say a word or write, then we each speak of our own world, in our own language. I of home, you of foreign places; I of God, you of money; I of Eschenwinkel, you of the city. I know it from your letters."

He looked sadly before him, his head bent under the burden of the truth which she uttered so certainly, yet gently and quietly. Suddenly he laid both arms round her and said kind, loving words. She bent her dark head back, his face was deeply moved, and she regarded him with eyes of anguish. They neither of them heard Franz Strandiger or saw his face appear in the narrow doorway and vanish again. He bit his lips together, returned to the parlour, and stood in silence by the window.

"So that is it?" he thought; "that is the way it stands? It's unfortunate. And Lena must conquer. I have had enough of being other people's servant. This is the place for me. There is land and money here. I must speak to Lena at once. She must bring him back to her immediately, and if she gets him the plan is good and I will carry it out; for

I have more eagerness and determination than any of them . . . and when Lena and he are out of my way and I am tenant here . . . I won't be all my life tenant and agent, I will be master. I will take the whole of Eschenwinkel, and Antje Witt and Reimer, and everything else, and make a fine snare of it, and catch Maria Landt round that lovely body of hers and draw her to me; then I shall never give up the lease of the Strandigerhof, but buy it some day with my wife's money."

His sister stepped up to him, looked at his face, and said, "I intended to tell you that it's tedious here, but now I see your eyes . . . What has happened?"

He seized her with both hands and said, laughing lightly, "Yes, Lena Strandiger, something has happened. I have seen Andrees Strandiger turning away from all our fine plans and taking refuge in some one else's arms."

"Andrees?"

"Yes . . . you have fire, sister!"

"Maria Landt?"

"I thought you had good eyes. But go into his room. They may be standing there still, and I don't know what else has happened. You know he looks very handsome in his dress coat, does Andrees; he has a figure like a pine-tree — well, you are not very enthusiastic about trees — like a Uhland. You can be bridesmaid, and the Eschenwinklers can stare admiringly at you and your dress."

"Be quiet!" she said, and her deep, full voice had no ring in it, and her dark eyes were piercing.

"Why? . . . It is done! Or will you fight for him? But I tell you he was embracing her warmly; shall I show you? Like this? And it won't be easy to get him away. You have delayed too long, Lena. Many girls become old maids that way."

After supper Heim appeared, accompanied by Ingeborg, in the living-room, and was introduced. He wanted to greet his old friends, and to take Maria, who was going over to Frau Witt again that evening.

Ingeborg had whispered in the hall that he must be very amiable; but since the carpet, an unusual thing, seemed to distress him and influence all his thoughts, he forgot to greet the old Hoboken circumspectly, and pressed her hand with such violence that her face twisted. Then they sat down, since

Heim had still half an hour, and talked of various things: the city and the country, townspeople and country people. After the old lady had somewhat recovered she took a lively part in the conversation. Franz and Lena left the room.

Heim and Ingeborg sat close together, and in this safe union they defended the country and its inhabitants. The old woman's voice sounded shrill and harsh.

"The towns have the intellect."

"And it comes from the country," said Heim. "We don't provide the towns with turnips and cabbages only, but with body and soul."

"You are right, Heim," said Ingeborg.

"Of course," said Heim, who was growing warm, and so cheerful and expansive; "what the town cannot make use of — the refuse — it sends back to us in the country."

"Really," said the old woman, and drew herself up and looked at the speaker with wide eyes.

Ingeborg laughed. "Excepting, of course, present company."

"If a man has no ground under his feet," said Heim, "he is lost. Andrees and I used to find that out when we were wrestling. Once in the air, and down you go. That is why the people of large towns have always something in them that is restless and uncertain and capricious."

"Excepting, of course, present company," said Ingeborg, and the locks of her hair and her eyes seemed to shoot daggers.

"We have plenty of land," said Heim. "Only go across the heath, and if any one troubles us there we can run into the Watt. In the mud one can stick fast splendidly. Land! that is what makes men and trees strong."

So Heim talked on, and stretched out his long legs before him; he had forgotten where he was, and did not notice that Lena Strandiger stood in the doorway and looked at him with wide eyes. Ingeborg called his attention, and instantly Heim became quiet and reserved. Lena Strandiger's eyes came from a world which Heim had never learnt to know, and which closed his heart and his lips.

When Maria entered the room, ready to go to Eschenwinkel, he stood up with a deep breath, and followed her through the hall. In the porch he discovered that he had left his stick in

the passage. He turned round, and happened to look through the glass door. Anna Witt had climbed on to a stool to turn the lamp out, and Franz Strandiger stood by helping her.

He followed Maria without his stick. As they reached the Wehl Hinnerk Elsen met them. The sparks from his pipe flew right across the dark road. He came with his usual self-confident step. Heim hung back a little.

"Hinnerk," he said, "do you know what's the time of day?"

"Five minutes to nine," said Hinnerk.

"No, my boy! I didn't mean that. Do you look well after Anna Witt?"

"Always," said Hinnerk Elsen, and drew himself up.

"Well," said Heim, "then there's no fear, but I thought I saw a weasel after a dove."

Hinnerk Elsen was not disturbed. "I always tell her she must be a good girl. That goes a long way."

"Generally speaking, you're right, Hinnerk. But will that be sufficient with Anna Witt?"

"She is a dear girl."

Heim tapped him on the shoulder, and raised his eyebrows. "I know that, my boy, for she is my neighbour's child. But do you know if I had to look after a girl with such mischievous eyes as Anna Witt, I shouldn't think it enough to tell her that she must be good; you must help her, you must make it easier for her to be good. Where have you been so late?"

"With Reimer Witt. We have been talking a little."

"Who cooked dinner for the children?"

"There was nothing for dinner; but about five o'clock Frau Haller brought a great boiled pudding. They ate half of it, and then went to bed. Reimer and Antje are sitting up."

They went on through the dark night. A soft, melancholy west wind came from the dyke across the Wehl and beat against the small house with its low-hanging thatched roof; it was quite green with moss; at night it looked black. There was a room on each side of the front door. The sick woman lay in the one on the left, the children in that on the right. In the sickroom a woman's tall figure moved slowly to and fro. She nodded her head sideways, keeping time and sang. Reimer Witt sat crouched on the bed, and a torturing cough sounded from it to the window. Meanwhile Antje sang with her melancholy, wavering voice —

“ When the night is from the dark sky  
    Softly, sadly, down descending,  
And the night wind with its wings spread  
    Over our small cottage bending ;

“ When the many thousand children  
    In the arms of sleep are sinking,  
And the grass in all the fields round  
    Dew of night in peace is drinking ;

“ Then there rise about my bedside  
    All the pale white train of sorrow ;  
And they talk my troubles over  
    Till there dawns the sad grey morrow .

“ And they say it and they know it,  
    All is to destruction tending ;  
For the poor and for the foolish  
    Sorrow never has an ending .

“ When at day dawn, by the woodside  
    The first glory rests adorning ;  
When the sun its bright, soft web weaves  
    Of the light rays first at morning ;

“ When the many thousand children  
    Rub their eyes and so awaken,  
And by all the tasks of morning  
    I am followed, overtaken ;

“ Then my soul awakes and rises,  
    Vanishes the train of sorrow,  
And with quiet heart and tranquil  
    I go forth to meet the morrow .”

She sang on, wandering up and down with her head bent. Then all was still. The sick woman had fallen asleep.

Reimer Witt bent forward still further. He had folded his hands between his knees, and sat and looked at the sick woman with quiet eyes. Antje had sunk down in the chair by the window, laid her arms on the table and her head on her arms. The melancholy light of the lamp fell upon her hair. It was dark, but showed already many threads of grey.

“ I will not go in,” said Maria, and drew back in the road. “ The children have a light; I will see if they are asleep.”

The two stepped gently to the low window. In the middle of the table there stood the old kitchen lamp, and near it, on a large white plate, the half-eaten boiled pudding. It was so large that it had not fallen in pieces.

"That must have been a splendid size," whispered Heim, as he saw it. "At least four pounds of flour."

"Hush!"

The bed was partitioned off, and inside it a sleeper moved. A flaxen head was lifted, and looked blinking at the light. A straight thin leg showed itself over the edge of the bed. It belonged to the ten-year-old Dora. The child got up slowly and sleepily, with half-closed eyes, stood uncertainly before the bed, stumbled forwards, turned back, took the hand of the sister who slept by her, turned round again and stumbled, blinking, up to the table; she opened the drawer in a way that showed she was accustomed to doing it, took a fork in her hand and, since there was no seat in the whole room, she leaned heavily on the table and began to eat. The tall Bertha came and leaned beside her.

Then the table creaked. The twelve-year-old Karsten heard it; he had been dreaming, and not by accident, of a big boiled pudding. He straightened himself out and saw between his lids the shadow that was made by the half-moon of the pudding; he saw the movement of their arms and the thrusting out of their forks. At once he was all eagerness and, as he had only a short way to go, he sprang up, stumbling in the same way.

What had been done with the Witt children was this — The parents were young and light-hearted when the first child came, and they had quarrelled over its name. Old Thomälen had come in. She lived in the last house then. She is dead now. She could not work any more, and it took her all her time to keep from breaking the ninth commandment. She told them: "You will have a great many children. I know your family. Your mother, Rieke, had eight, and yours, Reimer, had such a number that at last she forgot how many there had been, for she grew a little weak-minded. There were either thirteen or fifteen, and she often told me there had been a quarrel in the house every time. It was through the names, Reimer! For your mother wanted pretty names, and your father short ones.

Do you know what you must do? Go according to the alphabet. Call the girl Anna."

So they had, and that was the Anna whom Hinnerk Elsen looked after and kept good. The second child, who came a year later, was called Bertha. The third was a boy. He got the name of Carsten. But Pastor Frisius, who knew nothing of the lex Thomälen, wrote the boy down in the parish register with a hard "K." So the whole fine plan was spoilt and old Thomälen had once again cause to say that the pastor was clumsy. And so she came to grief once more over the ninth commandment.

They kept to the order, however, and avoided quarrels; little Hans, the eighth, had just come, and the low-roofed house was full of strong, bright children with tremendous appetites, when suddenly the mother fell ill. The children had taken all her strength, and with the little vitality she had left she could not struggle against consumption.

From the sickroom there sounded again a painful cough. But in the children's room the little legs and arms appeared one after another. Little Fritz, who lay on the ground with the two youngest, was awakened by a rough shaking. He was sorry for the two little ones and made them stand up in bed, and they too stumbled towards the table, perfectly silent like all the others. Each took a fork from the drawer and worked away. Bertha put little Hans on the table. He had his eyes completely closed, and he breathed deeply and heavily, but every time some one put the fork near his mouth he opened it and took a bite. Each time he slipped further forward; then they pulled him up with their left hands, for they held their forks in the right.

It was a short contest, and the boiled pudding was the vanquished one. Fritz, the liveliest of all the Witt children, lifted up the big dish; his whole body seemed to disappear behind; he moved it up and down, then he placed it carefully on the table.

Now it was perfectly clean, polished like a mirror. Bertha took Gustav and Hans back to bed. How they got under the cover was their own affair. Then all was quiet; the lamp burnt more brightly and illuminated the silent room.

Heim Heiderieter drew a deep breath and stepped back from the window.

"I wish," he said, "that the old Hoboken could have been here and seen this. I would have taken hold of her by main force and pushed her against the window-pane, first that of the sickroom, and then this. And if her hard heart hadn't softened at the sight I would have banged her against the wall."

Maria Landt shook her head in her quiet way. "You are too violent. Such people can't be changed — that must come from above. If old lost veins of gold in people are to be brought to light again, or strong new feelings awakened in them, it must all come from God. And if it comes it comes stronger and stronger, like the wind in spring, and no one can hold it back. The old put bandages round their ears and say they don't want to hear; the children creep into the corner and say they are afraid, but the wind roars on. We who have the light in us must have bright eyes, and be kind and help, every one as they best can. And Heim" — she seized his arm — "If any one can and has got the gift from God he must tell people of the strong fresh wind which is near, and whose sound we hear already, and about the great quiet work of God which goes on all round. He ought to fill his soul with faith and dip his pen in hope, and tell them of the fresh love of God which passes through the land. He must speak for the people from among the people; he must speak of their necessity and their burdens, of their striving and their mistakes, their courage and their tears. He must tell it all, and his eyes must shine with love and joy. What he writes must stand out like fiery letters, set up so that people may see them from afar, and perhaps use them as a guide, and so find sooner the way which leads to a new age."

Her voice was pure and gentle and tender, and yet full, like a church bell touched lightly with one finger. Heim drew back a step and looked at her, and wondered that he felt no love for such a pure being, but only a warm, reverent affection. Only later, when she was lying in the graveyard at Strandiger, did he understand what meaning she had had for him, and that in this night-hour before Reimer Witt's cottage she had pointed out to him the task of his life more clearly and plainly than any other human being or any book had ever done.

Maria went back to the Hof; but Heim sat at his writing-table for an hour longer with a pale, quiet face.

### CHAPTER III.

A WEEK later, on a dreary October evening, Hinnerk Elsen sat at table with Anna Witt. The meal was over and the housekeeper had already got up. Hinnerk Elsen was cheerfully lighting his evening pipe when he remembered what his old friend Heim Heiderieter had said to him that evening by the Wehl. It occurred to him now because Anna Witt had been so quiet all day. Before her voice used to be heard through the whole house.

“ Is anything the matter with you? ”

“ What should be the matter with me? And what do you care about it? ”

“ Your father told me — ”

“ Ah! — you are tiresome. ”

“ What do you mean by that? ” said Hinnerk Elsen, and took the pipe out of his mouth in astonishment.

“ Has my father told you that you ought to look after me? Well then, do it. ”

“ I am doing it. ”

She looked reflective. “ Well, ” she said, “ I think I may be stolen from you yet. ” She glanced up laughingly, but under the surface her eyes showed distress and fear. “ It is so dull in the evening, ” she said, and her quick fingers played with the table-cloth. “ The housekeeper creeps to bed at half-past eight; you go exactly at nine. But I am not tired then. You should stay up a little with me. ”

She looked at him, and once again there was fear in her eyes. But Hinnerk Elsen did not see it. He screwed up his pipe, which did not fit properly. How untidy to have a pipe like that. Hinnerk Elsen had a quiet, contemplative manner. He was too lazy to investigate into other people’s minds and too conceited to think that anything could escape him. He was such a magnificent person that he could afford to go through the world with his eyes shut. Who could deceive Hinnerk Elsen?

Then Anna Witt begged once again for her soul. She bent closer to him, leaned back, and said —

“ I am still so young.”

“ You were seventeen in July.”

“ Yes, but you think that I am still a child like Bertha. But I am not.”

“ No,” he said, and grew a little warm. “ You are no child, I can see that, but you have not sense enough yet. When you are more sensible, and I have a full two thousand marks in the savings-bank, then — ” and he nodded to her and blinked.

She leaned against him and said: “ I am strong enough already. I earn fifty thalers. If you love me you had better show it. Often something comes between and great misfortunes happen. If I were to run away from you now? And you had not looked after me?”

Then Hinnerk Elsen stood up solemnly and said: “ Girl! what nonsense have you in your head. I will look after you, and you have your father and mother too.”

She stood up, roused and angry. “ Yes, if I were a young lady; they can stay in the house and be looked after. Then nothing could go wrong with me. But mother is ill and father works in the fields and I am in a strange house — and you? ” She thrust at him with her hands and looked at him wildly. “ You are as old and dried up as Pellwormer! You are as hard and dry as shoe leather.”

In spite of his scolding Hinnerk went out smiling.

So Anna Witt begged the second time for her soul. But Hinnerk Elsen did not understand her prayers. He had fixed views on everything, and was no observer. He was too stiff to bend down to other smaller people and look in their faces to see if they felt sorrow or anguish. Anna Witt did not appeal to any one else, so far as is known.

The same evening Andrees went by the foot-path across the heath to the village. It was damp, misty weather, naturally according with melancholy and dreaming. He was doing violence to his own mind, trying to tear his thoughts from his home and his old love, when suddenly Maria came towards him from the village. Her tall figure rose into view as suddenly as a vision in the dusky air.

“ You look tired, Maria. Where have you been? ”

"To the parish officer; I have been to ask help for the Witts."

"Have you been sitting up again?"

"Last night."

"Let the old women do that," he said angrily. "They have nothing to spoil."

"You don't understand, Andrees, that one's heart burns to help."

He shook his proud head. "No, I don't understand that. I don't understand you."

"I know it, Andrees. Are you really going away from us and is Franz Strandiger to be master here?"

"Can I stay with you when no one understands me?"

"You don't understand yourself, Andrees. No, you don't. If you go away, the time will come when you will long to be here where you used to be so happy, when you will long to see the heath and the North Sea and to hear the Low German. Your heart will be torn with longing, you will feel yourself cold and empty, and, most likely, you will come back here if only to die. I have known you from your childhood, and I know that your inmost heart clings to your home and I know that it clings to your heart now you have returned. I could tell from all your letters that you found no peace while you were away, and I saw you yesterday — you were coming out of the garden and the sun was shining and you looked at your beautiful old house and the stables, and you heard the horses in the stable, and you looked so restlessly and sadly at everything that belongs to you."

There was excitement on her pale face as she looked across the heath.

"It is not I who entreat you. I have withdrawn completely into myself and I have no wish outside. It is your home which speaks to you. The soil and this country accuse you." She pointed across to the wood, which looked as quiet in the melancholy weather as if it were listening. "Your fathers came here from over there; in a long struggle, which was almost too much for human strength, they mastered the sea. On its body, when they had conquered it, they built the Strandigerhof. Five or six generations have lived there and now you mean to leave it all, to let it, and sell it for the sake of the wretched money.

And your children and your descendants will be homeless because of you."

"Am I a servant? Doesn't every one who can afford it do what he likes?"

"No, we don't do what we like. Your father did not sit behind the stove; he went out into the Watt to conquer new land from the sea for himself and his children. Reimer Witt went to the war and asked no questions; he said that it must be so for the country's sake; now from morning till night he works at heavy, almost hopeless work. Antje Witt goes whole miles into the dangerous Watt in the early morning to get food for children who are not hers. We all have our work. The force of duty drives us. We obey our conscience because it calls us with a harsh imperious voice. We understand that we must do it whether we are able or not, and we know that there lies our peace. We all work, the whole village. The only ones who do not are the old, who sit by the wayside and wait for the Lord, and you and those whom you have brought here. And that — that we despise."

"And Heim Heiderieter, whom you all think so much of?"

"Let him alone! Don't count him! He is still in the making. Don't say that he is idle. He has grave, earnest thoughts, and his life is not easy. His home will help him to become a complete man."

"Will help him — why not me?"

"If you will not let it? If you repulse and thrust away from you all that is good and dear and old, for fear of its disturbing you! Is it so, or am I saying what is not true? If you stay here could you be idle here, just one who enjoys things? Would not your home and your country, your friends, and the houses in Eschenwinkel, the Watt and Flackelholm — would they not all urge you to work, to do something good, to make something new? But there, away, far away from the needs of home, there you can be idle and enjoy yourself, and live on its labour."

She sought his eyes. But he gazed before him in silence. Then she turned and went away, and he could not help looking after her, as she went down the heath till her figure was lost in the distance.

He crossed the heath to the village, outwardly calm, and

with a strong, assured tread, but the depths of his soul were heaving and stormy.

"I will do it! What ought I to do?"

He was not clear where he wished to go, but he knew well enough what the goal would be. The first houses of the village rose before him, great long roofs made of reed or thatch, on low, red walls. Darkness had come, and nowhere was there a light or a sound or a human being. Everything seemed to be dead, in the sky above and among men. Here and there from the stables sounded the rattling of a chain. He felt it almost uncanny. The churchyard gate opened with a slight jar, the sandstone monument on his father's grave stood upright like a man of stone, and looked at him dumbly — as it seemed indifferently. His hand slipped, unconsciously, and yet caressingly, through the ivy leaves on the church wall. There, between the clock tower and the church, stood the man to whom he was going, whose words he longed to hear, though he feared them.

Fradius came down the path, much bent and not without difficulty — for he was already very weak. He straightened himself in astonishment.

"Andrees, my boy! You have not visited me yet. Were you coming to me?"

"Not exactly, uncle — and yet — "

"Or to your father's grave?"

"I have seen it," said Andrees. "I wanted to tell you, uncle, before you learnt it from others, that I am thinking of letting my estate."

Pastor Fradius looked up at him — he was much smaller than Andrees Strandiger.

"I heard it from Heim. Explain it to me. Are you taking some office — work in the city?"

"No! But . . . I have learnt too much of the world, of life."

"And this knowledge prevents you from cultivating your father's land and doing your duty? Then make a grave for your knowledge, Andrees — not in this good land, but somewhere where people put such things."

"It is strange how you all fail to understand."

"No, it is strange that you should fail to understand us. You are going to let it to Franz Strandiger?"

"Yes; I thought of doing so. He is a relative and a clever farmer."

"They cannot bear him here; they have despised him from his childhood. He has something about him so harsh and proud, and has no respect for the poor. They say he has no heart. You have neither of you any heart!"

"You are hard on us! You, our pastor!"

"Do you know the parable, Andrees, of the man who also wished to go away, and went and travelled far? Do you know why he went? I will tell you. Because it was too quiet and too laborious and too pure for him in his father's house."

"Uncle! But you are behind the times!"

Frisiaus nodded his grey head and looked at all the stones which stood and lay there, and to the northeast, over the low willows, and the white evening mist which covered them, and stretched into infinity.

"They say that! I shall not try to dispute it; it is no matter for disputing. Do you see the mist is spreading veils over everything? Over such subjects there are always veils. And yet we cannot help looking and staring and trying to find a way. Only the careless people, God's sheep, go foolishly bleating through the mist, up and down, without an aim or a goal, and ask nothing. But we others ask: you, I, many round about us, Antje Witt and Reimer, and Reimer's wife, who has asked for her last communion, and finds it so hard to breathe. We are all wandering through the mist and asking: Where are we? Where are we going? And we cannot rest until we think we know."

"Science knows it. Philosophy —"

"Philosophy! Let us respect her! She looks into the mist with the eyes of the mind. But how far? Tell me one single result that is assured, one single way that leads to the light! I could sing a sad song of the curse of philosophy: I know little of her blessings, of that side. She has made most of her children proud and hard and lonely. She is no mother; she has a face of stone."

"And science?"

He stood still, and keen excitement glowed in his deep-set eyes.

"Two years ago I was in Berlin — for the first and the last time — for I shall not live much longer. I visited the

'Urania.' I was there five hours; I stood by each apparatus, and a friendly guide explained it all to me, and I," his voice almost broke with excitement, "I was as happy as a king, Andrees. They look into the mist with keen eyes and keen glasses, and they see very very far. They see many worlds, but not all. Perhaps they see one out of a thousand. They know the material of which the worlds are made, and they know the order in which they move. They have studied His works so valiantly and they know so much, just enough to creep like wood-worms through His footstool. They know much of His laboratory, but do they know Him? They tell us themselves that they do not. You have looked in their books! Have you heard any voice through the mist? We are going wrong. Once again I say, we are going wrong. We shall never find the way! But now I tell you this. There is one thing that can shine through the mist on the fields — only one. I saw it this summer, one evening, and it came from the other side — from the other side, Andrees — a rising storm with bright lightning. One flash lifted the curtain for awhile, twice, three times, and it was perfectly clear. I saw plainly the meadow and the white road to the town. We ourselves, Andrees, from this point, could not find the road; it is too dark. But He — from the midst of His mystery — He sent the light from the other side twice, three times — then the road was plain."

He coughed weakly and painfully. Andrees Strandiger shook his head. His mouth was drawn with bitter grief.

"You are mystics, uncle. You and Maria and Antje Witt."

"Yes, that is right, you can put the three of us together. We belong to the same type. We are not ashamed of our sister. We stand by that. And now count out your names against us — the known and the unknown. One faith is pitted against the other. For what you say about these things is faith, just as ours is, and not knowledge. And now I ask you, Andrees, what do you really think: which are the happier and truer and more peaceful, those who follow the cross through the mist or those who try to find their own way? Which have the clearer eyes? Tell me that!"

Andrees did not answer. He stood silent for awhile before him.

"Let me go," he said then. "Another time. . . ."

"May the other time come, Andrees!"

And Andrees went back through the quiet village between the peasant houses; from the low windows here and there a tender bright-eyed gleam of light looked out into the darkness. Then the ground sank down and the road grew more sandy. On the left lay the Heidehof and on the right the school, and now Reimer Witt's house rose out of the darkness.

Little Fritz Witt stood in the middle of the cross roads, and said —

"Father has gone to the chemist's and mother is coughing."

Strandiger roused himself from his thoughts. "What can I do?"

"Father told mother: 'We have not a single penny in the house.' Have you any money?"

"Are you begging?"

"I? I am no beggar boy! But you were passing! And mother says that Anna has still fifteen marks owing to her. Won't you come with me?"

Strandiger's handsome proud face grew hot and red all over, but he went with the boy.

He felt himself ill at ease. The passage was so low; the potatoes lay in a heap in the corner; the air of the room was oppressively warm, and Rieke Witt looked so white and thin and had such large feverish eyes. What had become of the bright girl who once served at the Strandigerhof?

"The boy says that you have still fifteen marks of your daughter's wages owing?"

She would have so liked to address him as Andrees and "thou," for she had known him from childhood, and in such circumstances it is the custom of the country, but since he was so stately and distant, and did not even ask how she was, she felt constrained and cold and the words seemed to freeze on her tongue. She had been so glad to think that he would visit her and say "Rieke," and be kind and friendly, then she would have talked to him about the children and especially about Anna.

The door opened and Heim Heiderieter entered the room; he had to bend very low to avoid striking his curly head. He had his gun in his hand, carried a great hunting-pouch over his grey woollen jacket, and his high boots were smeared with wet

sand and soil. He nodded carelessly to Andrees and, as he went up to the bed, he said in his natural true-hearted way —

“ Well, my girl, how are you? ”

Her pale, wasted face changed suddenly, something like a gleam of youth flashed over it, almost a touch of coquetry, and she looked smilingly in his bright, kind eyes.

“ Thank you, Heim, when you are here — ”

“ And Maria and Ingeborg? And Haller? We have none of us much more than happy faces.”

“ You have more! ”

“ Yes, this time.” He fingered his hunting-pouch. “ A young hare! I wanted to show him to you; Telsche shall cook him for you to-morrow.”

He sat down cheerfully on the edge of the bed and crossed his long legs. He looked perfectly happy. Since he had been at home among his old friends he had gained a feeling of confidence, he had accustomed himself to a broad, tranquil path, and had at times the courage even to resist Telsche Spieker and to quarrel with Andrees.

“ Really two hares have come into the room. When I was coming down from the heath I saw Ingeborg below on the road. I thought she was going to Telsche Spieker who will tell her all my sins. I have not a good conscience because I have done very little to-day. So I took refuge with my friend, the other hare, in this house. If she comes I shall creep under the bed.”

“ You are too big. Fritz does it very often. His ball rolls under the bed sometimes.”

Andrees got up.

“ Stay awhile,” said Heim, “ and let us have a talk.”

He tried to seat himself comfortably on the edge of the bed.

“ You, Ingeborg says, mean to let your whole property. To Franz Strandiger? Then there are three hares in the room.”

“ What do you mean? ”

“ I suppose it’s according to the maxim, ‘ Sell what you have inherited from your fathers that you may enjoy it properly.’ ”

“ Sweep before your own door, Heim.”

“ Thank you, Andrees! A very just remark. He has had one in for me, hasn’t he, Rieke? ” And his eyes twinkled merrily.

She nodded and smiled.

"But there is a difference, Andrees," he said. "Don't you see? Heim has six cows, six swine, five calves, eight young cattle, four horses, two-and-thirty acres of land, besides the heath and a gun and a pen and Telsche Spieker. But you, Andrees Strandiger, are the master of much land and destined to be a helper to many people."

"Who has destined me?"

"Our Lord God! says Ingeborg Landt. She says that when she is sweeping before my door."

The front door was opened quickly and a soft, light step crossed the threshold.

"There she comes! Rieke, help me! Really and truly, there she is."

She took the bright-coloured handkerchief from her head, which was covered thickly with waterdrops.

"Go away, Heim," she said; "I can't get to the bed for your long legs."

He stood up obediently and leaned against the wall, and she sat on the chair by the bed and stroked the sick woman's hand.

"He will talk you really ill, Rieke; you should send him away."

"Let him stay, Ingeborg! He talks me almost well. You know it."

Ingeborg turned her head and looked up at him and avoided looking at Andrees.

"I don't know what people see in you!"

He looked surprised. "Nor I!" he said, and she had to assume a stern expression in order not to laugh.

"Dear child!" he went on. "You were explaining your philosophy to me awhile ago. You get it from Pastor Frisius; you think it would be a very good thing if we, Andrees and I, would listen to it sometimes."

She leaned back in her chair, her eyes were fixed on the sick woman, and she stroked her hand gently, a rich colour slowly covered her face.

"Well!" she said, with a stiff turn of her head. "If you did listen it couldn't injure you. Certainly not! It is quite simple. I don't know where I got it from. Certainly Pastor Frisius gave me the idea. It is this. The good God has shared

out the earth like a garden and given every one a piece. Heim Heiderieter got a very big piece, the Heidehof and everything belonging to it and more here." She pointed to her forehead. "Andrees Strandiger got a very big piece." She made a sweep with her long arm. "In the same way every one received a piece, big or little. And then God did like this with his hand and said 'Cultivate it.'"

"That isn't Frisius, that's you. Frisius never moves his hand like that."

"Be quiet! Now every man can cultivate his piece of land or he can leave it alone. When he cultivates it he has bread and a good conscience. When he does not the weeds and heath grow over it. Then comes the first punishment: they feel hungry, here." She pointed to her heart. "Isn't it true, Rieke? But afterwards, when they leave the earth, they must suffer because they did not keep their garden in order. But if a whole nation lets its garden grow wild because it is idle and sleepy, or if they throng and push and extend their borders till the plots of the poor people are made quite small, or till they are thrust to the very edge of the ditch and left in the highway; and if no one rises up in the nation, no strong, clever man, and fights for the poor people and encourages the idle to work courageously, then the great Master of the garden grows angry and sends strong men above them or else knocks their heads together, and gives their garden to other people." She struck her hand lightly on the edge of the bed. "And that you can read many times in history."

Heim bent his head and listened quietly. He raised head and hand together.

"Very good! And now make the final application — let it be for him."

"No, for you, for you!"

"That you do very often."

"Yes, Andrees." She looked at the sick woman and her delicate face flushed again. "Andrees? Andrees ought to look after his garden!"

"Yes, child, he means to. He will keep a gardener, and he himself will sit with a long pipe and a loose dressing-gown."

She sprang up with flaming eyes. "That is not possible. That is hateful."

The sick woman coughed. "Stay with us," she said. "The happiness of so many depends on you."

Heim stood drawn up to his full height beside Ingeborg. "If Franz Strandiger is master here he will lay waste the whole garden."

Andrees turned round and went out.

So three times an appeal was made for Andrees Strandiger's soul, and he stood still and listened. But twice again it was taken captive.

When Andrees came home it seemed as if they had all gone to sleep. Everything was quite still in the wide old house. He opened the door of the parlour, not accidentally, but because he was urged by defiance and a secret hope. Lena Strandiger was there in the chair on the right of the window; there was no one else present. He stood before her and they looked at each other. She did not move.

"Why do you look at me so? You know that I love you."

"No!" he said, trembling. "I don't know it."

"You bear! I like you because you are a bear. The men I know, and I know so many, are so smooth, so adroit, so dainty, so soft. I don't like any of them."

He did not move, and she laughed lightly to herself as if in a dream; then she looked up at him, gentle and smiling, and entreated.

"I could not help thinking of a time like this. I had been invited to supper at a captain's house. The whole house was full of handsome young men, and they were very attentive to me. I remember that a young merchant said more to me than he might have cared to make good, and I think I was a little touched, though I told myself that the right man was not there, not in the whole company. But afterwards when I went out — I had danced a lot — and passed through a quiet anteroom, there stood a fusilier — you know, one of the cockchafers, as they call them — a corporal, a bright young fellow; like you, Andrees, with a fair moustache. He looked at me so frankly, and I saw that he was not timid, and that he was pleased with me, and I — I had not been satisfied by all the foolish flattery — he spoke Low German, came from your neighbourhood, a farmer's son, I don't know whose."

She nestled more closely in the cushion.

"When any one pleases me, in my heart, my very heart, here where I put my hand, then, then I am his, then he finds a warm true place here."

"I wish," he said hoarsely, "that you had never crossed my path."

"It was just like that he took hold of me then, strongly and firmly."

"Be quiet! I will tell you. It must come to an end. Don't look at me so. Look away! I will tell you! I am masterful and fierce. I will have what pleases me, and not ask if people laugh or weep. And this side of me wants you, for you are like that too — you, a woman! But at the bottom of my heart there is something quite different."

"Don't tell me! I don't want to know it."

"It comes from my father. It is warm and tender and wants to shine from my eyes and laugh and weep with the people among whom I live; it loves my home and doesn't want to leave this house and my father's grave. And since I have seen the house again and the sea, Eschenwinkel and the grave, and the church and — "

"I won't hear their names!"

"Maria Landt," he cried, and flung her hand away. "You are hard; she is good and tender, and yet — yet I cannot let you go."

"Yet you let my hand go! I can push yours away so easily. The cockchafer, he suspected what was in me. He had fire as I have. I had to thrust him away from me. He tore a piece from the lace in my sleeve, he held so fast, and I had to wrench myself loose. But you, Andrees Strandiger, I can push your hand aside. What do you want with your hands on my lap?"

"Let them stay."

"You should let me go and take me to the station to-morrow, early to-morrow. I am dangerous. Perhaps I may ensnare your poor soul even yet."

"If you could only change, if you had anywhere something tender, a heart — "

"Perhaps! But not here! In Berlin. If I were with you, always with you, quite near, I might become warm and tender!"

"Tell it me plainly — "

“Tell it you? I will show you! Come with me, Andrees! To Berlin!”

She had sprung up and pressed wildly to him, but immediately after she thrust him away. Then she fled out of the room.

## CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER week had passed, and the weather had not changed. In the dark Andrees Strandiger went slowly home. He had gone on foot to the town, had met some acquaintances at the inn, and now was afraid of returning home.

He stood still for a moment, and wondered if he should return to the village, and spend the evening with Heim. But they none of them understood him, and he did not understand them. It was best that he should make a quick end of it all, and go out into the world.

From the land there blew a slow, heavy wind. It brought the strong, fresh breath of the old earth. Damp and cold it blew through the land; every one whom it touched got fresh colour in their cheeks, and drops of moisture in their hair. It was so that afternoon with Ingeborg Landt. She came along the Wehl with her head uncovered, and her hair loosely knotted as she sometimes wore it. And Andrees had met her, and thought "Ingeborg will be strong and beautiful sometime. But it is not her time yet. She will have then what is wanting in Maria: a happy, courageous heart." But he had not thought of her any more. The wind went on, singing lightly, and dragged the long webs of mist out of the sea.

"Above there lies Flackelholm; exactly there, where the wind is going. Great, and still and lonely, it lies there, like a giant who has laid himself down full length on the edge of the surf to sleep, and is holding the sea off with his broad curved back. How still it will be there? No one goes there, and round it is the wide field and the Watts, grey, and smooth, and endless, and the enormous sea. If I could be alone there for a whole week, with the great waste round me, perhaps these things would seem different. At Flackelholm? Yes! The whole world and one's own life would look quite different, seen from there!"

The wind passed on, talking, muttering, singing as sailors

sometimes sing while they toil heavily, dragging up the anchor.

"Far away in the sea lies Flackelholm. But who could find the way? What foolish thoughts! — to Lena Strandiger?"

There are the elm-trees. There are the lights shining from the house. There, underneath the dormer roof, is the light in Lena's room, and she is standing there. She has raised her hand, and is holding up her mirror, the one he gave her with the carved wooden frame; her fingers are clever and skilful, and she is putting the finishing touches to her hair, her beautiful black hair. He stands and looks up and breathes deeply. He feels a curiosity to look into Maria's room, and see what she is doing. He goes round the house and sees his mother's light in the bedroom above, when he steps back a little he catches sight of Maria Landt sitting by the table in the window. Both arms are leaning on it, her hands are folded and laid against her left cheek, and he can discover nothing of her face. But he recognizes her attitude, and he knows it well enough; behind those hands are sad eyes and pale cheeks, and beneath that dark hair there is not one single bright or happy thought. He shook his head, turned round, and went in through the front door. And as the ring of the door-bell sounded along the passage and into her room, Lena Strandiger laid her mirror down and said aloud, "To-night I will make sure of him." But Maria Landt shrank together. "There he is! and I cannot keep him, however hard I press my hands together."

Anna Witt entered Lena's room. Her cheeks were hot, and her eyes were bright and glittering.

"Herr Franz Strandiger wishes me to ask if you will come to the parlour."

Antje Witt stepped into Maria's room, looked round in distress, and said quickly —

"Come with me, Maria; Rieke Witt is dying. Death came down from the churchyard, along the Sandway, and went by the Wehl and flapped his shroud against the window. She can't breathe any more."

In the parlour it was warm and cheerful. The lights of the chandelier stood as proud and upright as if they imagined they were shining on people who were all happy and self-satisfied. The unreflecting lights cannot distinguish between hap-

piness and splendour. The soft dark carpet said, "I have never yet felt such light feet as Lena Strandiger's."

The armchair leaned back still more softly and comfortably, and said, "Sit down, Andrees; Lena Strandiger will come soon. She will talk to you about travelling and the great, beautiful city. Maria Landt has sad eyes, and the air is oppressive in Rieke Witt's sickroom. But as for you and Lena Strandiger — your place is here."

Lena came, and she had just received letters from Berlin. All their acquaintances sent kind regards, and asked, "When is Herr Strandiger coming back? We miss his serious face, his proud eyes, and fine figure." They had sent on an academy catalogue, containing reproductions of the pictures, a neat, handy volume with rounded corners, and Lena pressed close to him and their dark heads met. She showed him the pictures, and called his attention to names they knew. As she turned over the leaves they came across a landscape which showed a heath, and an old thatched roof in the background, and she said, laughingly, "Heim Heiderieter's Heideheim." So she talked on, and held his attention; she seemed to take his soul in her hand and lead it through busy streets, into splendid castles, and among happy people, filling it with the joy of the great city. And he was silent.

Franz and his mother entered the room. As she turned round to see who was coming, bending a little aside, she lay right on his shoulder. A quick glance passed between the brother and sister.

Franz Strandiger stepped carelessly up to Andrees and gave him a paper.

"The lawyer has drawn up the contract as you wanted. I think the whole matter can be arranged now."

Andrees bent over the great sheet of paper. Again Lena's head was close to his. Then they began to talk. They spoke even more loudly and calmly and carelessly than they were accustomed to. They talked like people who were speaking of small and trivial things. The old woman went to and fro with quick steps; she did not once pass through the door of the second room, though it stood wide open, and though she was in the habit of doing so. She went quickly to and fro, her hands crossed behind her back. When that paper was signed, Franz would be tenant there, perhaps later on the owner; An-

drees would go with Lena to Berlin, and all would be well. Hard times lay behind her. The generous sum Andrees had paid for his board, and the yearly present from her brother, an old bachelor, had maintained the Berlin household, but in a very small way. What a tinsel show it had all been. Hard years! But now it would be different.

"I have put twelve years' lease," said Franz.

"Well! If we both agree the lease can be extended."

"The whole of the upper storey will remain for your mother and yourself, as well as a team of horses. The details are here in the fifth clause."

Andrees sat at the table, leaning his head on his hand. He looked at the pen with which he had followed the lines on the paper, and he wondered who had put the dainty thing in his hand, and thought it looked like an arrow.

"It is my pen," said Lena, and nodded at him.

"It looks like an arrow."

"Yes," she said, "it is piercing a heart."

She looked at him questioningly with restrained tenderness, but he thought of Maria Landt and the people in Eschenwinkel, and drew his pen back from the paper.

"It is a serious thing," he said slowly, feeling the importance of the moment, "when any man gives his rights over land and people to some one else, and for a piece of paper. . . . To be homeless."

And suddenly, as he mentally traversed the inheritance of his fathers, he had an inspiration. The blood rushed to his face, and his eyes roamed over the table. He thought of the lonely, quiet land where his thoughts had been that evening and, as he might have recalled a forgotten dream, he remembered that once, when they were on the Wodanshill, Maria Landt had spoken of Flackelholm as a place of refuge in trouble.

"Flackelholm is not mentioned in the contract."

"It is not named, but it is included here in the third clause."

"Flackelholm is not a 'foreland,' but an independent island."

He took up the pen which he had allowed to fall. "I don't know why — perhaps because I may hunt there some time — I will except the island and its foreland." And he wrote: "With the exception of Flackelholm and its shore and its Watts, which extend to the river Flack."

The door of the next room opened, and Ingeborg Landt appeared. Her quick, observant mind recognized at once that something extraordinary was going on. She saw the document and the pen in Andrees' hand, she looked at their faces, and she knew all. She raised her head, and her eyes grew wide. She remained standing at the door.

"You are doing a great wrong to us all, and I — "

"And you?" said Lena Strandiger, with her hand supported on the table.

"I have thought so much of you as long as I can remember. I thought you a hero — "

"A declaration of love, Andrees!" said Lena, laughing.

Her brother Franz gazed at Ingeborg Landt in astonishment. She was charming to look at.

"If I did love him," said Ingeborg aloud, "what does that matter to you? It is all the same. If he deserts us here so disgracefully, I wish I had never entered the house."

Andrees stood up and went to her. "Ingeborg," he said harshly, "you forget yourself. You are all behaving foolishly and forgetting your manners."

"Forgetting our manners! You are forgetting the difference between good and bad, truth and lies!"

He shook his head as if at a loss.

"Come with me once more, Andrees, on the heath. Come with me to Frisius. No. I know. We will go to Heim, and we three, Heim, and you and I, will talk it all over. You know, we will sit near the green stove where the fire burns so pleasantly, and the lamp will stand on the chest, and Heim will be cheerful and tell us old stories about our country."

Franz Strandiger looked at Ingeborg. Easily carried away and a man of impulse as he was, he had forgotten the whole contract, and was simply enjoying the scene. Although he was easily moved to mockery and always felt himself master of his surroundings, yet his whole sympathy lay with this fresh young creature who stood on the threshold, at first so proudly and almost scornfully, but at length in entreaty.

"Go with her, Andrees," said Lena, jestingly.

"Be quiet," he said roughly. "They mean well to me."

Then Franz perceived from the tone of his voice that everything was endangered, and in a moment he was changed. He

stepped up to Ingeborg, he looked at her proudly and conscious of his strength, and said gravely and with flashing eyes —

“Fräulein Landt! this man here, Andrees Strandiger, will soon be thirty. I am about the same age. We have both reached our majority. Think yourself. You have a clear mind.” He was not jesting at that moment. “Think yourself what it looks like if you, with your eighteen or nineteen years, should interfere with men such as we are in our business relations. Tell me.” He laid his hand on his cousin’s shoulder. “Is he a man or not?”

Then Ingeborg looked down. The strong self-conscious manhood in his eyes and bearing was too much for her. She understood as if it were with bodily fear that he would only need to lay a firm hand on her shoulder and she would be forced to her knees. She looked in his eyes, her whole face suffused with colour.

“I lay the blame for all that happens,” she said slowly, “upon his shoulders.” And she turned round and went out.

Soon after, Anna Witt came to Ingeborg’s room. “I am to ask you for the key of the wine-cellar. They want to drink a bottle of the best wine, Fräulein Strandiger says. The master is going back to Berlin, and Herr Strandiger is staying here.”

She went singing along the passage.

Frisius stood near the bed.

“It was always Saturday, Herr Pastor, my whole life long. Always cleaning and scrubbing. Nothing else. With all the children!”

“And now Sunday follows Saturday.”

“Yes! And I am glad — for myself. My heart feels so light now I have taken the holy communion. It goes as it must. I will think of God now. But Reimer! And the children!”

“We will all look after them, Rieke. Be at peace!”

She turned her head slowly to the room, which was full of people.

“Yes, we will all take care of them,” said a young woman who had four children herself.

“You, poor as you are,” said the dying woman gently.

Pastor Frisius went. The widow Thiel came from the win-

dow where she had been sitting quietly as long as the pastor was there.

"It is best, Rieke, that you should tell your husband to marry again. He must do it, for the children's sake. If you tell him he will do it sooner. Then the children will be looked after."

A faint flush suffused the sick woman's face, and her eyes grew still brighter. But she thought at once of the children.

"If he could get a tidy girl, not so young, that would be best. Antje cannot do it."

"If Telsche Spieker would do it?"

"Telsche! Yes."

She lay still awhile. Then she asked, "Is Peter Nahwer there?"

The old carpenter stepped up to the bed. He had his short pipe in his mouth as always, though he had not smoked for years. The doctor had forbidden it.

"He cannot pay you for the coffin, Peter Nahwer."

"Don't trouble, my girl. Next autumn! Next autumn!"

"If you can manage it, Nahwer, make a nice coffin with a little silver on it, and two wreaths of pearl beads. For the children's sake."

"You shall have a coffin like mother Thomälen's, Rieke. I have still some good press wood. It is really meant for beds and chests of drawers, but it looks very nice."

"It's all the same, Peter Nahwer, make it of that."

"I will, my girl!" Peter Nahwer stepped back and drew at his pipe.

The widow Thiel made a sign to him with her large hand, and said in low tones, while she looked at him severely —

"You must make me a coffin just like Thomälen's. I went to the Strandigerhof with her for years. I won't be worse off than she is. Do you hear?"

By the bed stood another neighbour. They had been summoned quietly, by children's soft voices, and they came at once and spoke in low tones and bent over the bed, and stepped back and said to one another: "She can't last much longer," and she heard it and waited for the end.

Maria Landt stood at the foot of the bed; she rested her dark head against it, and her eyes were full of tears.

Then the door opened and Ingeborg appeared. She went up to her sister immediately, and said —

"Oh dear. Andrees has signed the deed, and the Strandigerhof is let."

There was complete silence.

Then came some half-uttered, quiet comments. "Well, then! Eschenwinkel won't stand much longer."

"What will become of us?"

The sick woman turned her eyes to Maria. "It doesn't concern me any more. My work at the Hof is done. But you always said that he was a good fellow."

"He is. The others have talked him over."

"You have the most power over him. You can make everything right again. Don't forget that. I—I will think of something else, now. It is time. The children! Maria, will you pray? Quite loud! I feel as if I could not hear. But Maria, you know; put everything exactly as it is."

And Maria prayed; it sounded as warm and tender as if it came from the depths of her heart without need of speech: "We entreat Thee humbly for eight children that Thou mayest guard them from hunger and neglect and cruelty, and from wicked men and great misfortune. And because they will have no mother to look to in their troubles, great and small; we entreat Thee that Thou wilt look to them. We entreat Thee for their rising and their lying down, that they may not be cold in winter, and that they may have some one with them whom they love. We know that Thou art the Father of all orphans and wilt let no orphan child come to destruction; but we know too that Thou art glad when Thy children come to Thee, entreating or giving thanks. We trust Thy promises for life and death. Amen."

She had pressed her hands against her breast, but she let them fall now and waited sorrowfully till the spasm of coughing was over, and the sick woman lay breathing weakly and with difficulty, her eyes half-shut.

"What do you say? Is Andrees Strandiger dead?"

Ingeborg bent over the dying woman. "No, Rieke, he is going away from us."

"Pray for him! Fresh pure air blows over my heart when you pray. Pray!"

Maria sobbed aloud.

Then Ingeborg said: "Let me," and she prayed with a firm voice: "Ah God, we are all in great need, all Eschenwinkel,

and we and his mother and he himself. Thou canst do what Thou wilt; but he cannot do what he will. Show him Thy strength. I remind Thee of Thy promises, that Thou dost desire that all men should be helped. So help us, give us all bread and our own country and our own homes. We are encompassed with distress, we do not understand Thee and Thy doings, but we trust in Jesus Christ and look to Him. Thou wilt lead all to a good end. Amen."

It was in some such way she prayed, with her brow furrowed, but her eyes shining. The wind blew over the Wehl with a rushing sound, and the rain beat against the window.

While she prayed Reimer Witt entered. He wore his working clothes and had drawn his winter cap over his ears. He looked weary. When he saw all the people and heard the praying he understood that the end was coming. He did not weep; his eyes were not wet for so much as a moment, but a sallow paleness covered his face, and his eyes took a fixed, gloomy expression. He gave the medicine-glass which he had in his hand to Maria, and bent over the bed.

"Andrees!" she said. "He is standing outside at the window and looking in the room. God knows what he wants there."

"Rieke."

"My Reimer, the dress suits her. Reimer! I cannot go to communion this year; I will next. Your dress fits you, Bertha. Only you can't go with them to church. Your jacket—there are six left—Reimer. Now we will go. Thank God, it is Sunday."

Her soul tried the first languid strokes of its wings; her breath grew weak, but light. It was a long time since Rieke Witt had breathed so lightly. Her soul stepped to the threshold, her heart stood still. Her soul took wing. The house stood empty, and if a house stands empty it falls to decay. Her face grew very still. She was dead.

Then Maria Landt went across to the children. The door opened lightly as if of itself. Fritz came to meet her. She knelt down before him. Instantly he became as tall as the tall, beautiful maiden.

"Fritz, your mother has gone away."

"Is she dead?"

The bigger children began to weep, and the little ones joined in. Fritz alone was quiet. He wrinkled his brow as Ingeborg had done when she prayed.

"You say she has gone away?"

"Far away to another country."

"Does the sun shine there? And do they give you enough to eat?"

"I think so, Fritz."

"Well, then it's a good thing that she's gone away. Here we don't have enough. But now we shall get something. When Hans Leesen's father went away, the people sent meat and cakes — large white rolls."

Maria Landt stood up. Something in her wept terribly. "It is sometimes good that one person should go away, then the others get enough. That is what it means to die for others." She felt her head weighed down as if a heavy hand were laid on her hair. She stepped back into the room. They had all gone out; only Reimer Witt sat by the bed. She offered to watch through the night with him, but he asked her to go. Antje stood in distress in the passage, and she sent her to the children and then went. As she walked along by the Wehl — it was very dark and she had a difficulty in getting on, the wind blew so strongly against her dress — the same weakness came over again, so that she stood still. Again came that burdensome thought that the death of one might bring happiness to others. It was like a heavy hand pressed into her brain. The idea seemed thrust into her mind suddenly, and, as it were, bodily, so that she staggered. But this time also she tore it away. She raised herself from her knees with difficulty, and went home low-spirited, as if in a heavy dream. Her heart was naturally gentle and tender, and the death that she had seen moved it too deeply; she seemed to collapse and lose the true relation of reason and will. The sad, comfortless confusion of everything in the Hof and in Eschenwinkel was too much for her. The storm had raged in her for a long time, continually increasing. Now, to-night, the first spray came over the dyke. A little more and the wild waters would flood her soul.

Yet, so far as Ingeborg remembered, she slept the following night well and soundly, and somewhat recovered.

And meanwhile Reimer Witt watched alone by his dead. He

walked to and fro round the table which stood in the middle of the room. Each time he passed along the bed he looked at the pale, quiet face, and each time he passed along by the windows he looked at a picture which hung on the wall between them. It was really the place for a mirror, and they had often said they would buy a beautiful one when the four eldest children were confirmed. Until then they thought they would not have money enough. So the picture hung there. It was a bright-coloured print, twenty years old, two handbreadths long, and about the same width, and underneath was written, "The Battle of Verneville."

At first he could not understand what connection there was between the pale face and the bright-coloured picture. Then suddenly he realized. The sweat stood on his brow while he thought of it. Once before in his life he had lived through a terrible day. It was that day of Verneville, and now to that day was added this, just as fearful, just as heartrending. That day had made him a grave man, this one made him a quiet man. And the recognition of it made his heart stand still. When his soul struggled out of the waves of his present grief, it seemed only to fall into the grief of the past.

"Do you hear the cannon, Reimer?"

Jan Requist, who was next to him, the man from Stülperkoog, looked at him with wide, terrified eyes. His helmet was pushed back to his neck, and on his forehead were great drops of sweat, bright like the heads of nails. They were both boys, only twenty; they had followed the plough with the seagulls flying round it, singing as they went. Now and then they had gone to church, now and then to a dance, and they had thought of nothing more.

"It's like mother's coffee-mill. Do you hear, Reimer?"

Reimer Witt pressed his lips firmly together. His eyes stared gloomily at the ploughed-up white Grantstrasse. The two battalions were passing over it towards the cannon. There was nothing to be seen of Heinrich Thiel.

"March! March!"

It was a good thing that they were all going together — ten thousand before and ten thousand behind — or else he felt that he would have flung everything from him and run and run, till he came to some field, far away from the crackling and roaring, and rolling and raging. He would have run till he found a

simple field with a plough on it or a spade, something he could turn his hand to, that would enable him to work busily at the dear quiet field with the sea-gulls flying over it till evening came.

“Do you hear, Reimer? Those are our guns.”

“The heath is burning in front, or what is it?”

Before them everything was covered with grey-blue clouds. They rolled about like tall, indolent giants, spread out their full length upon the earth, and roared.

“We are still a long way from the shooting, Jan. I think we shall come up to it to-morrow, perhaps.”

“Do you think so? Or else I would — ”

“What would you do?”

“The rifles — they are swarming — ”

The ground descended to the right.

“Well, where are the ten thousand before us?”

Scattered here and there was the figure of an officer, bent down as if to leap, his sword thrust in the earth before him. Two or three horses with long blue trappings were racing over the prostrate men. They lay there in long rows, their legs stiffly apart, their chins on the ground, the butt ends of their guns pressed to their cheeks, all covered with smoke.

“Reimer! Reimer!”

Something screamed out.

“That was a horse, Reimer.”

They were lying there together.

“Get out of the way, I can't take aim. Do you see the red fellows?”

“Get out of the way, Fritz!”

“He looks as if he were dead.”

“As if he were dead?”

The bayonet lay before him, pressed slantingly against the ground, his head had sunk against the butt end of the gun, and his left eye was closed, but the one with which he aimed, the right, was still open.

“Jan, Fritz Hellerwatt is dead!”

Before them an officer fell, and then another; the first fell over like a lead soldier, the second sank on one knee and kept his hands still up, folded on his sword-knot. From the left came a cry of anguish. A hussar strode across the field towards them, careless of the shooting, bareheaded, with his arm bare,

and the blood dripping down it. When he came nearer Reimer Witt saw that his boots were reddened from the red grass.

"Ah, God!"

Suddenly, as the scene changes in the theatre with one sudden movement, everything altered in his mind — everything that had been in the foreground, important, and large, and plain; the bright uniform and the girl in the town, the whip with the braided leather handle and merry Jan Requist, his best friend — all that grew quite small and fell back, and there remained something, something that had been far in the background of his mind, among all kinds of broken and despised toys. To this corner his thoughts seemed to rush, they found some half-broken fragments, and clung to them firmly.

"Look there, behind the earth wall, those cursed brown fellows. Witt, aim well!"

"I am but a tiny child,  
My strength is weak, they say;  
I would so love to go to heav'n,  
But know not how I may."

"Three hundreds yards! I have hit him. He has it. I am hit, I have it too."

"If in my latest anguish  
Thy comfort may be given,  
Then harsh and bitter death will be  
Only the road to heav'n."

"Up! the drums are beating. We must go on, as sure as we are Schleswig-Holsteiners."

Three fell at once.

"Give my love to them — "

"When before Thy door I stand,  
God, Father, let me come;  
Thy court so pure, Thy house so bright,  
O let them be my home."

Reimer Witt turned away from the picture, and went hesitatingly round the table, like a boy who is sent on a message, and who walks slowly as he reaches the end, thinking over what he has to say. When he came to the bed he meant to pass on, but he turned round, and seemed to be listening to the word

of command in the distance; then all at once he sunk down as he had done in the field of Verneville, and remained quietly on his knees, and once again, as he had done then, he stammered his child's prayers. But this time he did not need to search in the corner. They lay shining before the door, glittering pearls. Since the day of Verneville, Reimer Witt had known that a God ruled the world, a God so near and so personal that it was possible to address Him as "Thou."

They say that it is such and such a time since we went to France. There are many thousand houses over the whole country, large and small, on mountainsides, by rivers or by the sea, where the fight against France is still going on to-day. Some fight in memory, awake or asleep; some have brought with them the seeds of death from wet beds or chill outposts, from hunger and cold, or wounds and sickness, and some one is always dying for the fatherland; others, who are related to the fallen, or to those who died after, bear the scars of Verneville; they suffer in their hearts and lives, in their food and clothing, in their education and their whole lives. How long shall we go on fighting? The whole of this generation will pass away before there is peace.

## CHAPTER V.

IT was December, and near Christmas. The grey-white clouds passed on like heavily-laden packmen, and provided the whole land with the customary white festival robe. One cloud wagon after the other passed by, laden to overflowing. And as they passed on they jolted down a part of their load, so that the March and the heath grew perfectly white. They came from the west, and the little white stars fell even over the stormy sea. What can the cold, restless sea want with Frau Holles'<sup>1</sup> soft bed of white down? It will never sleep.

People were glad to see the snow-wagons come. The children were delighted because they could make snow men; the elders said that it would be no proper Christmas without snow. Old Pellwormer, the night-watchman, who was well read, but thought slowly, got so far as to say that a white Christmas was among the things that had been promised to men since the time of Noah.

When Heim Heiderieter woke up — it was about half-past seven — the bright reflection in the low, broad window told him at once what had happened in the night. He opened the window and looked over the wide snow-white heath and down to the March, and nodded a lively greeting to the clouds which hung above. Then he dressed himself, went immediately into the big room, sat down at his writing-table and worked for two hours.

Yesterday he had stayed in the inn till twelve, and had spent three marks; his conscience troubled him, and he was afraid of Telsche Spieker's face. He heard nothing of what went on in the kitchen or the stable, and he saw nothing of Telsche Spieker. He sat and read and thought deeply. He was searching for a subject that would make a good story. He built castles in the air and let them fall down again into the sea. He made the destinies of poor men, who lived and acted and

<sup>1</sup>According to old German mythology the snow is Frau Holles' down bed.

died as he wished. He did with men just what a child of two does with a box of bricks. He knew nothing of what went on around. The hare which sat outside, crouched down among the cabbages, might have looked in at the window and Heim would not have noticed.

At ten o'clock Telsche Spieker came in, bringing the scent of the cows with her, a warm kerchief round her head and shoulders. She looked really fresh, and her eyes were bright.

"Heim!"

He heard nothing.

"Heim, wake up, and come down to me!"

Heim raised his head and blinked at her sideways.

"What's the matter? Do you want a hot-water bottle for the hare in my cabbages? Or has Ingeborg made you angry?"

"You have no need to make fun of other people; they could pay you back. I was at the Witts."

"Well, Telsche?"

"They can't go on much longer that way. It's simply unchristian to stand by and see it. I don't know what has come to the Lands. They don't seem to trouble about the poor creatures."

"What is the matter? Tell me!"

"The little ones sit in their beds, and want to stay there the whole day, and they are right, for the room is cold and the hearth as well. Bertha and Karsten are at school. Fritz sits by the cold stove."

"Where is Reimer?"

"He went to the market at Husum yesterday with Klausen's oxen. He told me what trouble he was in."

"And the woman, Antje?"

"They got a letter from the apothecary yesterday. He talks about selling them up. She has gone to see him!"

"The wretch! I wish I had him here in his biggest retort. Doesn't he know how warm he sits and how cold the children are?"

"Yes, go on scolding. He has his rent to pay soon! Help them, Heim!"

"Surely — they could — up there." He pointed with his thumb in the direction of the school.

Telsche Spieker continued: "Didn't they do enough the whole year when Rieke was ill? Haven't they something to

do themselves? The two hungry youngsters are coming home this afternoon for the holidays. The parents are naturally wild with excitement. Do you hear? The children are singing Christmas carols. The school breaks up this afternoon."

They both listened. The distant sound rang through the walls and entered the window. The well-known melody was like a caress. They were silent for awhile. Heim looked gloomily on the broad boards with their bright nail heads standing out on the worn floor.

"To think that one can never be happy!" he said, and struck on the table. "Not even at Christmas! We are always pretending that every one is happy at Christmas; we write and tell lies about it, and wrap ourselves up to the ears in our warm quilts. All men happy! Wretched, miserable lies!"

"Yes. Who is to help now?"

"Well — we first of all."

"Yes. Have you money, Heim? I have still five thalers for housekeeping, but I must manage with it till we sell the young steer."

"Oh, dear! That stupid money!"

"Yes, the money! You ought to manage carefully. Put your whole heart into what you are doing; and, above all, don't throw money through the window, then you would have some to give the poor."

"Confound it!" He sprang up and reached for the ink-bottle.

"I will tell you something, Heim. We can't go on like this." Her face had grown scarlet. "You must take a wife. If I stay with you you won't become anything. I have no influence over you, and you have nothing to make you work. You are always thinking, 'Ah, Telsche Spieker will look after everything. I can take my ease and go to the inn.'"

He was quite overcome. He turned to the window, feeling wretched and forsaken. Then she grew quieter and more gentle.

"I really think of going away, Heim. It would be best for you. But now, tell me what we must do with the Witts?"

"Go across. Light the fire in the stove," he said, grumbly.

"And who will cook the food and clean the room and do the washing? Antje cannot. You know that she is at home

one day and in the Watt the next — in her senses one day and the next morning quite lost."

"What are the women good for?" he said angrily. "Can't you put your heads together and find out what is to be done?"

Half an hour later she heard the children coming from school; they were filling the playground and the road, shouting and laughing. She went to the door, opened the upper half, and when she caught sight of Bertha Witt she made a sign to her.

Bertha had grown very quickly, and was tall. She came running, her shoes throwing up the loose snow, and her thin garments blowing round her lean figure. She wore her usual grey dress that had been made from one of Frau Strandiger's; and she had a black kerchief round her long neck to show that she was in mourning. The kerchief had made her neck a blue-black colour.

"What do you want me for?" she asked, her lively grey eyes sparkling.

"Come in, girl, and be quiet."

A moment later she was seated by the warm hearth with a plateful of hot pea soup.

Telsche Spieker went again to her work in the stable; she milked the small black and white cow which had calved three days before, and she saw and heard nothing more. Heim sat and wrote.

Then the outer door opened cautiously and Karsten Witt crept in, his shoes in his hand, and crossed the passage to the kitchen. He threw a single glance in, a long, reproachful glance; then he stood still a moment. He thought of what they had just been taught in the school about the sixth commandment: to give help in all bodily needs. He stepped back over the threshold, threw his slippers on the ground, stepped into them, sprang down the road and tore open the door.

"Telsche Spieker has pea soup. Bertha has got some already."

Immediately, without observing any order, but all together they rushed and stumbled up the road, took off their slippers at the door as if at the word of command, though no one spoke — Hans had come in his stockings — and a moment after they stood by the hearth and waited, looking at the big black pot which steamed so pleasantly and invitingly.

Heim Heiderieter came, thinking that the calves had broken in.

"Heim!"

He saw at once how matters lay. His eyes filled with pleasure and delight. Close by stood the brown earthenware dish in which Telsche Spieker mixed her dough. He poured the hot soup into it. Then he got seven wooden spoons.

"You must blow on it."

Heim sat down, the dish on the wooden stool before him, and fed the two little ones. It was a brief task, but warm and quiet.

Telsche Spieker, who was just crossing the threshold, heard a low sound. When she came nearer it seemed as if the kitchen held its breath. Heim stared at the empty dish and bit his lips. Telsche came in.

Fritz saw there was something wrong, but he was not in the least afraid of Telsche. He said —

"Look and see if there is any more in the pot."

Telsche pointed with her finger and said emphatically to Heim —

"Well! you can look out for your own dinner now. I sha'n't cook it for you." Then to the others: "Have you had enough?"

"No!" said Fritz.

"Then you shall each have a slice of bread, then another half-loaf will be gone. Bertha, go home and make the fire! Clean the room out. I will come this evening and look after you."

Telsche Spieker ate a piece of bread and began to clean the kitchen. She blamed the children for bringing in so much snow. Heim Heiderieter walked to and fro between the stables and the big room. He tried not to show his hunger, but looked several times into the kitchen and vanished again when he heard her grumbling. When he returned to his writing-table Anna Haller came running across; she was his neighbour's only daughter, and she was fifteen. He knew her step at once, although she wore slippers. It made him angry. "Why has the stupid girl got slippers on?" He heard her pleasant child's voice at the kitchen door. "We have been washing, but I have finished. Have you had your dinner?"

"Yes!"

"Have we?" muttered Heim.

"We are just going to have dinner," said Anna. "We have curly greens."<sup>1</sup>

"Have they really!" It was his favourite dish.

"I wanted to ask, Telsche, if I can have the sledge and a horse. The boys are coming home this afternoon."

"Ask him yourself. He is in the big room."

Heim tore open the door. "You ought to say 'the master' is in the big room."

"Ah!" said Telsche Spieker, "the master! the master! Over what? Over me? Over this house? How much of it belongs to him? Or over himself? No! Not even over himself! For he stayed in the public-house till twelve o'clock. Ah! He wants to be called the master! Herr Heiderieter!"

Heim passed his hand through his hair. "What do you want?"

"I want the sledge."

"I will bring the boys myself!"

"No. I will bring them."

"Then you can come with me."

"No! You with me."

"Then I am not to be master even over my own sledge. I will come across at once."

"We must have dinner first," said Anna.

"The *master* has already had dinner," called Telsche from the kitchen.

"I can sit and wait while you eat, can't I?"

"Certainly. Come at once."

He went across, following her. She had a peculiar walk; even when she was going most rapidly she seemed to choose with care the next spot to place her foot. This gave her walk something childlike and clumsy. She might have been going on an untrodden path, she walked so carefully, almost timidly.

"Have you a specially good conscience?" he asked lightly.

"You walk on the snow as if you were walking on clouds."

She detected at once from his tone that he had a bad conscience, and seized her opportunity.

"Where were you yesterday evening?"

"Yesterday evening! A little time in the village ale-house."

<sup>1</sup> A North German winter dish, cooked with sausages.

"Then leave me my good conscience! A little yesterday!  
A little to-morrow!"

"What can I do?"

"You could have come to us or gone to the vicarage."

"Do you think that I want to be always serious?"

"No! Oh, no."

"You might have invited me."

"We didn't dream of it. You know you are welcome."

"Then say no more."

In the kitchen, when Heim had gone into the parlour, she said hastily —

"Mother, Heim is in the parlour. He says he has had dinner, but Telsche made such signs with her eyes! Don't offer him anything."

And they did not. Nothing was offered to him, and he sat there, stiffly and wearily. The curly greens smelt delicious, and there was a lot left.

Anna carried it to the kitchen. "The boys will be hungry," she said. "I will keep this warm for them. O how glad I am they are coming!"

They heard her clattering the plates outside and singing light-heartedly. The old man had lit his pipe and he began to discuss how the sixth commandment should be interpreted, and laid emphasis on the duty to help and assist in all necessities.

"For it is not necessary to warn people against killing in these days, Heim. But help — they don't do it — in sickness."

"And hunger!" said Heim.

"Well!" said the old man, "the Witts dined with you to-day. I saw them leave your house. What was there?"

"Pea soup."

"So that's the reason why you didn't take any curly greens?"

The old man sat by the window. He looked like a prince reigning no longer but still of royal rank; he puffed vigorously at his pipe and looked out over the snow-covered landscape.

Heim felt faint. "I will go into the kitchen," he said.

"And I into the world," said the old man, and took his newspaper.

Anna was washing up alone; her mother was resting.

As was his usual custom he sat on the window-seat and watched quietly.

"Will you have some curly greens?"

"Yes, if you have some, and can spare it."

She brought him a small plateful and a fork. He did not move, but held the fork up and blinked his eyes.

"I think I am growing short-sighted."

"Why?"

"I can't see it. Will you draw my attention to the part of the plate where I may look for it?"

"Confess first," she said.

"The Witts ran off with the pea soup inside them. Give me more greens or I will break all the plates."

She gave it to him. So the sixth commandment was honoured in Heim Heiderieter's case also, but only at a late hour; it was one o'clock.

Some hours later — when it was nearly dark — the sledge returned from the town. Otto, who came from the Seminar, sat between Heim and Anna; he has a good appointment in Hamburg now. On the back seat of the sledge, with his feet in his big, straw-lined wooden shoes, sat Richard; he was an apprentice to engineering, and was dreaming of his mother's Christmas cakes. Now he has gone as first engineer to China, and Christmas is round again.

In the evening Heim sat at his writing-table, and with a bad conscience. He had done nothing, absolutely nothing that day, and he wanted to go in the village ale-house again. If that went on what would become of him?

He would not continue his writing, for it gave him no pleasure. Why didn't it? What he wrote seemed so far away. It was useless and uninteresting and ridiculous. It was not really his own. He leaned his head on his hand, and stared through the window.

"What have I done since I went to Tübingen? I went to all the lecture-rooms; but as soon as I had put my head inside I drew it out again. Knowledge has a huge mouth. It's like a crocodile yawning at you. If it snapped its jaws together you would spend your life in darkness, and lose the power to see what is beautiful and great and free. Well, well — there was some laziness as well."

He got up laboriously and went to the door with long, heavy

steps. The lowing of the cows sounded from the stable, and some one scolding them.

"Be quiet there!"

Again he went up and down, peevish and restless.

"I must write something different — something quite different; but I don't know how. Sometimes I see it as one sees a sail; it appears and then vanishes again; it reminds me of a line of sea-gulls when they make a turn, and their white wings flash in the sun for a moment, then immediately after there is darkness. One must write something as strong and happy and healthy as Fritz Witt. And when you have read it, you must breathe as you would in the west wind. 'That is lovely and fresh.' You must feel as if you were coming out of a cathedral — out of the great cathedral, not as if you had been looking at weakly, pious men, with soft, useless hands and down-turned eyes, but as if you had been watching Siegfried, with his tall figure and his mighty tread and his pure eyes, and Queen Kriemhild at his side. Humble before God! That will be right as long as the world stands. But proud before men, that is, pure and free. But I haven't power enough. I am not sufficiently strong, and my eyes are not sharp enough. And yet I must. I must write something which is powerful and good, and has courage. And even if I am no artist, I can be a craftsman, an earnest and capable one."

He stepped to the window. The twilight made the snow look grey.

"I shall soon be thirty! And made like an oak-tree. What does Telsche say? You must take a wife. A wife! I have not enough to keep her. And whom? Ingeborg? Ingeborg! No, that's no good. In the first place, I couldn't expect her to take me. She has grown up in the Strandigerhof: would she come to this little house on the heath? No; and then we don't suit each other. That is an old lesson I learnt when I was a boy. The bracelet still lies in the pond. The other one with the brown hands." He shook his head. "A strange meeting! And the lady at Heidelberg? Strange! Well, it's done with. Where can they be? How wretched it all is."

Lost in thought he looked across the heath.

"Outside there is the wide, wide heath, and inside I sit behind the glass not like a man, but like the picture of one. My writing is worth nothing. My characters are not clear-eyed;

they are weak, and they have no faith and no love. Is it that I have no faith and no love myself? Is it that?"

He shook his head. "That's not it; there is something else. It is the subject I choose, the figures have no flesh and blood. I must take people from the old times, strong individualities. I have often thought of it. I will write to the university and ask them to send me some books, so that I may really steep myself in the history of the country."

He walked to and fro, restless and depressed.

"That is no good! It is not the subject, though that is important. It is in myself. I think it is really that. I have never been thoroughly in the midst of life. I must stand with both legs in the very midst of the stream, and keep my eyes open. I must see life round me just as it really is. For example, Andrees — and Reimer Witt. I must look at that for myself, in my own way. That is it."

He snapped his fingers, and crossed the room with long steps, his eyes brightening.

"One must get to the bottom of things as they are. One must observe life, and seek out its sources. Life is surging all round, but who sees the beginnings — the springs under the earth. People stand in amazement. Life is so confused, a true whirlpool. No. It has its beginnings and its course. It is a stream. Where does it come from? Where does it go? The man who knows that knows more than the rest."

He flung his long arms about, and reflected aloud.

"I think I have got hold of the right end. I will talk it over with Ingeborg. A thing becomes so much plainer when one discusses it with any one. And whom else could I talk to? Only Ingeborg! And what a clever little girl she is! Ingeborg! My comrade!"

A quick step crossed the passage, and Ingeborg stood on the threshold. Her whole figure was folded in a great apron. She always looked as if she had just that very moment put on a new dress, she was always so fresh and bright.

"What are you doing disturbing me? By all the saints!"

"What? Disturb you? You were calling me."

"I — calling you?"

"You were calling to me that your old cottage was in danger of coming on your head."

He sat down somewhat taken aback. She sat opposite to him

in his great armchair, her hands in her apron pockets, and looked at them gravely.

"Here with you," she said, "there is fresh air. One feels quite different. At home we live under a leaden weight. Maria is as pale as death, and so absent-minded. Andrees—" She sprang up. "Heim," she said, "could you have thought it possible? Oh, the pity of it! The pity!"

"That he has let the Strandigerhof?"

"Yes, that too. It is shameful; but fancy, Andrees—to leave us all in the lurch in such a cowardly way, and go off with that woman—Andrees!"

"He has lived with her family five years."

"And still, Heim! Andrees! Andrees!"

"You thought too much of him, Ingeborg; so did I."

She turned her face away and stepped to the window; when he looked towards her he saw that her shoulders were quivering with hot but suppressed weeping. He went up to her and put his arm round her.

"When is he going, Ingeborg?"

"I think that he cannot decide. He is sorry and unhappy. He looks quite bitter."

"Perhaps all will turn out well."

"But the Hof is let. We must go now."

"Then you will stay here—with me—Ingeborg; and then, when you can put up with me a little, and I—can pull himself together, perhaps—"

She turned round in his arms and looked up at him. Tears and laughter met in her eyes.

"Ah, you dear thing! Because you saw me crying!"

"I never saw you cry before," he said.

"That is it. But what you are talking of would never do, Heim. We have not sufficient reverence for each other. We get along splendidly as brother and sister. We are always quarrelling and being reconciled! But the other can never be."

"Well, then, no, you stupid girl! But don't cry then. No one could bear to see that. Let him go where he pleases, if he won't stay with us."

He was startled by her grief. "Let him go, do you say?" Then she added, like one whose thoughts were somewhere else—

"Come soon to the Strandigerhof, Heim! Do you hear?"

She was gone.

"Come back this evening," he called after her. "I want to talk over something."

Still somewhat excited, Heim went to the kitchen. It was already growing dark. Little Fritz sat on the wooden settle by the hearth: he had his hands in his pockets, his legs were drawn up, and he looked at the thick pancake which was steaming in the pan. In the whole of the large, low room there was nothing to be seen but the fire piled on the hearth, over it the open black hollow of the chimney, where the smoke went up slowly, and the bright eyes of Fritz Witt, glittering in the fire-light. He did not turn his flaxen head from the hearth, even when he heard Heim come in. He only said —

"It must be turned or it will burn."

Heim saw at once that the danger was imminent. "There is no knife."

"Knife? You don't need a knife for that! You must toss it over!"

Heim looked reflectively at the pan. He was always rather helpless in such matters, and had no confidence in himself. But in face of the dire necessity he took courage.

"Get out of the way! It is going!"

The pancake flew out of the pan like a wild duck from a pond, and shot up into the dark chimney. They both watched it. Heim had his mouth open and held the pan stiffly, ready to catch the pancake the moment it reappeared. But it did not return. Fritz Witt felt a darkness settle before his eyes.

"It is not coming back," he said, and drew a deep breath. "It must have gone out of the chimney long ago."

Heim placed the pan on the tripod so that it rattled. "Yes, if it's going on flying it's certainly left the chimney by now. Those wretched women! It's all their fault. Telsche!" he cried.

But she did not come.

"You tossed it too much," said Fritz. "Mother always said you were dreadfully clever; but if you can't toss a pancake — "

"But tell me, where is the pancake?"

"I don't know! In heaven."

"They don't eat pancakes there!"

"Don't they? I thought it was really nice there!"

"So it is, even without pancakes. But you can't understand that."

They stared before them sadly and reflectively. Fritz thought of the pancakes and Heim of Telsche Spieker.

Fritz looked up into the chimney. "Heim! Heim! It is there — hanging — on the bacon hook — all caught up together." He jumped on the seat, put one foot on the hearth, and looked into the darkness of the chimney. "There it is, hanging close by the bacon!"

"It's their relationship that has drawn them together,<sup>1</sup> Fritz. Get it down."

He lifted the boy above the fire with his strong hands. "Take a good hold. Be quick, boy! Telsche Spieker is coming. Have you got it?"

"Higher up! There's smoke here."

"Have you got it?"

"Higher up."

"Now! Have you got it?"

"No. My jacket has caught fire. Oh! it's smoking — I can't get down. Oh! it hurts!"

"Now he is on the hook, too."

The pancake fell in a heap close to the pan, but loud cries for help came from the chimney.

Then Heim sprang on to the hearth. The upper part of his body vanished in the chimney. Nothing was to be seen but Heim's legs and Fritz Witt's struggling feet. At that moment — of course at that very moment — Telsche Spieker came into the kitchen, and behind her appeared the fair head of Ingeborg Landt. Ingeborg came to herself first, and got the boy on the ground. His face was sprinkled with black and his eyes were full of tears, but he looked immediately for the pancake.

"Eat it up, boy!" said Telsche angrily, and pressed him down on to the settle.

"I wanted to toss the pancake," said Heim, "but I didn't succeed." He looked at Ingeborg. "Don't laugh," he said, and raised his hands.

"Laugh!" said Telsche, "at such stupidity?"

<sup>1</sup> In Germany pancakes are very often made with a mixture of bacon or ham.

Then all was quiet.

Telsche poured some fresh mixture in the pan; Heim washed his hands; Ingeborg sat on the seat by Fritz Witt.

"See Ingeborg. I wanted to talk to you about the art of poetry — "

Telsche set her dish down vigorously on the hearth. "You would do better to talk about the art of keeping cows. The red one gives very little milk."

"Come, Ingeborg! We will go into the best room."

After supper Telsche set to work in the passage. She arranged, cleaned, and packed the chest which usually stood by the wall to the right of the glass door. The outer door stood open, though a cold east wind came down the Sandway. Yet she scarcely saw Reimer Witt, he passed so quickly on his way from the station. He was hastening to his children. He wore sheepskin boots, and had a long crook in his hand; he looked very stately with his strong tread. He passed on, and, though unwillingly, she had to call him —

"Reimer, just listen!"

He turned round and stood still, looking at her. Her heart beat fast, and she could not find the simple words she wanted to say.

"You need not trouble yourself about the children, Reimer. They had dinner to-day, and I sent them some pancakes this evening."

"That is kind of you, Telsche. Where is Antje?"

"She went to the apothecary. There was a letter."

His head sunk. "What trouble we have, Telsche!"

"You ought to have a housekeeper, Reimer. You can't manage like this."

"Yes. But who would come to me? Shall I get one from the workhouse or from the streets? Who would come to seven children? And there is Antje, too."

"You needn't think about Antje, she only wants guiding."

"A nice woman won't do it, Telsche. You know that. It's no joke with the children."

"I will look round, Reimer; I know all the women who are free like myself, and see if I can't find you some one. She must be respectable — the other kind would never do."

"Yes, respectable! I should not like any one who was not

that. If you recommend her she will be sure to be good. You oblige me very much. I really am in a difficulty."

"You certainly are. Well, good night, Reimer! Don't be too downcast. I will see if I can find some one for you by Christmas."

She nodded, looked at him, and then turned quickly away.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE day before Christmas was bright and clear. A fresh sheet of snow lay pure and white on the heath, spread like clean linen on the Christmas table. The sun was still visible across the dyke. There were no clouds in the sky. It was plain that the holy night would be as it should be: the gleaming stars above, the white snow beneath, and the whole world calm and full of expectation.

Some impulse drove Andrees Strandiger from the room where he had spent the whole day out into the open. He had no definite aim, but he put his gun over his shoulder, and went across the white heath. A hare fled over the loose snow in tremendous leaps. Should he let it run on? Or should he come home and say, "I have shot a hare for you?" for those people?

The sun was sinking when he saw the Wodanshill close before him. He mounted the hill, and looked over the silent sleeping field to the straight white line of the dyke, and the black elms of the Strandigerhof stretching sideways from it. All that had been his! Had been! He had sold it for twelve years to another as one might barter away an old-fashioned carriage for a finer one with softer cushions.

He looked depressed as he stood there and watched the sun sinking in the sea. He stood in the quiet air with his home stretched out before him; it had touched his heart more and more every day; he fled from the sad present, and turned like a suitor to the past, entreating it for happy memories. And the past came close to him, and spoke of old times.

The night mists rose from the wood and passed slowly across the heath; up from the March their friends came to meet them. In the midst of the field they seemed to greet each other, and make signs, and undulate to and fro.

"There were three of you; you and Franz and Heim. And you were the chief. They all said that, even the people in Eschenwinkel. And afterwards at the grammar school you

were the most gifted, the best worker. Heim was uncertain: his dreams were more to him than anything else. Franz cared nothing for books: the life around him tore him away. Heim sat as if he were in the moonlight, and dreamt. Franz stood on the market and talked. But you were in a fair way then to become the pride and strength of your home. But then for the first time you came to the city, and among your relatives you learnt to regard life quite differently. You learnt that some were there to serve and others to rule, some to work and others to enjoy. It was not as the books said. And you became by degrees — though you did not know it — stern and hard. When you came home for the first time you took no notice of Rieke Witt when she wanted to greet you and said, 'I am glad, Andrees, you have come back.' You told Heim to his face that his father was a poor, crazy fellow, and you did not visit Haller."

Over the cold dead heath his friends seemed to come: Heim Heiderieter, a tall youth, with a gloomy, distorted face, and great tears in his eyes. Rieke Witt passed, bent and weary, and Maria Landt, still in short skirts, and with her hair down. She seemed to avoid him, and follow Rieke. The mist dissolved. Steps came up to him through the undergrowth. When he turned round he saw a young man crossing the heath with a woman. They did not see the figure on the hill, but he saw them. They were clothed in disorderly fashion, they carried bundles under their arms, and their faces were anxious. He knew he had never seen them before, but they were speaking of him.

"Strandiger must have led a wild life in Berlin, but I bet he will go to church this evening."

"That doesn't go well together."

"We are more honest," said the man. "We creep away and keep Christmas in the old wood hut." They both laughed.

"But Maria Landt!" said the woman.

"She is different."

"When I think of her I should like to turn round and go back to church." She stood still. "She won't take him for her husband. He is not good or pure enough for her."

"You are good enough for me."

"Yes. We are alike. Yes. Be quiet! Don't talk like this. It will soon be the holy night."

"What have we to do with it?"

"If we have nothing to do with it, it has something to do with us. Even if we don't love the Lord, He loves us. I will pray to-night — because of that."

"Will that help?"

"It is only to honour Him, not for myself. Yet He wishes to help us."

"That's past belief."

"He means something to the pure that they may remain pure — to Maria Landt and all the children — but to us —"

They went on and vanished in the wood on the very same path where the past had vanished.

Strandiger stood and listened. Through the quiet twilight he heard the noise of the Christmas bells from the town. The sound came like softly rolling waves of the sea, one stroke after another; they crossed the village, passed over the heath to the wood, echoed back from the wood, mounted sideways up the Wodanshill, and came to the lonely man with their gentle query.

It grew dark over the heath. Then the bells ceased. A man crossed the heath from the south. He seemed bent by the weight of an old age which had come too early; for he did not look sixty. He was laden with a heavy knapsack, which hung on his bent back. He looked like one of those people who have no home, and who wander up and down the land, from one village to another, from one road to another, driven by misfortune or idleness, or by some crime, or a bad conscience; they leave their homes when they are five-and-twenty, and they die when they are seventy in some wayside inn. He waded laboriously through the snow in the direction of the village. On his way, when he had come to the side of the Wodanshill, he raised his head and looked around. At first he was unobservant; then he grew attentive; then he grasped at his forehead. "What is that? I have seen so many church spires like that among the trees, and so many villages — like that. It's because it is Christmas Eve."

He went on a few steps and stumbled; his coat dangled loosely round his body, and once again he stood still and shook his head. "That was a hole for cooking. When they mow the heath here, they dig out these holes and make a fire in them." He looked up and stared at the village; at that mo-

ment the curtain of cloud and mist lifted a little, and the first star appeared in its place, right above the church tower; the man clutched at his grey hair with both hands. "It is home!" he cried; "my home!"

From the cathedral the deep tones of the bell came like heavily driving waves; the village bells joined in, and sent their first chords together across the heath. It was easy to distinguish the different syllables: "Fear not —, come hither —." But the old man shook his head and turned away, and went into the wood where the two figures had vanished.

Strandiger's teeth were clenched. The cold shook his limbs. The mist vanished; stars seemed to be flung out over the whole sky and remained where they fell. In the great hall of heaven the moon ascended its throne.

While he was standing there three of Reimer Witt's children came out of the wood. Bertha, with her bright eyes, looked left and right like a deer. She had little Fritz at her side. Behind her came Karsten with a small fir-tree under his arm.

"Look," said Karsten, "how dark it is. No one can see us."

Fritz trotted with difficulty through the snow. "Bertha, has Haller told you where God lives?"

"I know that," said Bertha. "Up there. You can see there now."

Fritz looked up at the stars, and stumbled so that he fell. When he got up again he was crying.

"Mother might come to us if it is so close. We are always so cold. But she just won't."

The others laughed. Bertha drew Fritz on quickly. Karsten blew on his hand, which was stiff with cold from holding the fir-tree.

"Well," he said, "you can go to her. It is not far. Only look."

And he pointed where the moon was showing behind white clouds on the edge of the wood.

"Can one go there," the little boy asked.

"On Christmas Eve," said Bertha, "the door is opened for the Christ-child who comes down with the angels. You can understand that; it's opened as wide as Heim's barn door when he takes the rye in."

They laughed, and the sound rang loudly across the heath. Then everything grew still. The children only showed like three points on the plain. They were but little plainer than the shadows which were advancing over the heath and gradually making the whole of it alive.

Quarter of an hour later Strandiger came into the vicarage study. Frisius had already his surplice on and his books under his arm. His eyes were sunken and showed some feverishness, or else some of the excitement of Christmas. Perhaps it was both.

“Where are you come from this holy night, Andrees?”

“I was going over the heath and I thought I would come to see you and say good-bye. You will have a great deal of work later on and I am going away immediately after Christmas.”

Frisius shook his head. “It is a strange time. Men despise the home which has nourished them and the faith which proves itself. You are deserting both. You are homeless twice over.”

Strandiger was silent and white to the lips.

“I am sorry,” said Frisius, “that I must say such words now the holy night is descending upon earth. My whole heart trembles with joy. I should have felt like a bird without wings during my whole life if I had not had this joy in divine things. And now you come, the only son of that fine, capable Friedrich Strandiger — who went to his grave, alas! too soon — and you tell me ‘I am going to make myself pasteboard wings and fly out into the world.’”

“There are many who manage without that faith.”

“It is not true! You know it is not true. They laugh, but not from their hearts; they live, but not like healthy men; they do not advance steadily, they leap or stagger, or sit by the way and weep. But to have your brother’s hand in your own and look in the clear eyes of God — that is life. Am I right? If I am not, tell me why you have come a second time into my house? They are not just polite calls. What do you want with the lonely old man? Your soul wants to hear of faith, and love, and hope. After all the unclean music it wants to hear a pure chord, the church-bells. You will not find it away from home.”

Strandiger turned round and already had hold of the door-

handle, but Frisius would not let him go away like that, and cried aloud in his distress.

Then Strandiger turned round as stiffly and woodenly as if he had been a board turned round by some one's hands.

"I have a cool, temperate mind," he said, "which forbids me to think much of these things."

"That is a mistake! It is not your mind which forbids it, but your heart. When a man deserts God he must not accuse his understanding, which is clear enough, but his heart, which is impure. The prodigal son left his father's house not because its ways were past his comprehension, but because it was too pure for his heart. What does the Lord say? 'If any man will do the will of God.' It is not a matter of clear understanding, it is a matter of good-will."

"There have been many great and noble men who had no faith. Think of Frederick the Great: he had none."

"He had little faith and little hope, but he had love. He served a whole nation till his death. He gave land to tens of thousands, and bread to hundreds of thousands, and showed millions the image of truth. Love is greater than faith and hope. Where there is no love revealing itself in deeds there can be no Christianity."

"I did not think you could be so broad-minded."

"Christianity is a philosophy of life which can be practised in the most crowded streets of Berlin as well as on Flackelholm."

"And what of those who don't wish to live by it — who prefer to live by themselves?"

"Andrees! As certainly as you will demand an account from Franz Strandiger when All Saints comes, so certainly will an account be demanded from you when All Souls comes."

Strandiger opened the door slowly, ready to go out.

"You are not going away for the first time. You have already been away a long while. You have already got to the place where it says: 'There came a famine in the land and he was hungered.' You have the famine now! That is why you came here! Why do you want to say good-bye to me," he added loudly. "You cannot go. God and your home summon you already. Your heart hears and wishes to turn to them."

Strandiger bent his head and went out. As he was crossing the churchyard he was met by a good many of the villagers. They greeted him like a stranger, and put their heads together. Those from Eschenwinkel looked down on the ground and stepped aside in the snow, which covered the fallen gravestones. In the church they were already singing

“From heaven high do I come down.”

He understood the words very plainly, and knew, too, whose soul had given birth to the hymn; he had been a true German man, strong, with a mind daring as the flight of an eagle, with speech like a ringing anvil, and courage enough to stand alone against the whole world. And yet he had sung this child's hymn! A child's hymn! And old and young sang it after him. He went past.

At the Strandigerhof they were sitting in the parlour. Franz sat at the piano and tried to play the tune of the bugle-call belonging to the regiment in which he had served. Among its notes there fell, like children under the hoofs of horses, the sound of the church-bells. Lena had pressed her left ear against the back of the chair, she covered her right with her ring-adorned hand. She sat in that attitude reading a book which Franz had ordered as the latest novel from Berlin, and the sound of the bell could not reach her soul since she had placed her clenched hand before the door. The old Hoboken went to and fro in the room, restlessly and quickly, like a marten caught in the hen-house. The bell sought for her soul, but it found only a stone on which dead figures were scrawled.

Andrees Strandiger entered the room, his eyes gloomy, his whole face angry and bitter. When he saw them together he suddenly remembered how his parents used to keep Christmas Eve in his boyhood, and he thought how the wild, harsh notes of the piano must cut his mother to the heart; then he laughed aloud. The two young people recognized the strange sound in his voice, and turned towards him their fine bold features. The old Hoboken was deaf and blind, for she was reckoning. She continued —

“How much net profit do you usually get from an acre of Marchland, Franz?”

“If you go over it, aunt, nothing but thistles will grow.”

She stood still, her hands behind her back, and looked at him keenly.

"You are drunk."

"Why not? You are keeping accounts; your daughter is reading silly romances; your son is sounding the assault. I drink. Isn't it all equally suitable to the holy evening?"

Lena hastened up to him, and since nothing better occurred to her, she said —

"You give me headache."

"Headache? What a creature you are! What have I to do with headaches. That I should have let you foxes into my barn? Out there everything lives with a real life. The whole of nature and spirits, and men who are her highest beings are as active as ants. But you are just wax figures. You have no life at all, and no nature. One presses a button, and *you* calculate, and *you* make eyes treacherously, and *you* envy your neighbour's house or wife. Don't you know it is the holy evening? In the church they sing as if they had angels' tongues. 'From heaven high then I come down.' Shall we go and stand near the church wall? We are not worthy to enter. We are not good enough either for the place or the people, not good enough by a long way. I shall go to my mother."

The whole sky gleamed with light. The stars shifted from one foot to the other and quivered, the air was so cold and clear.

The Witt children sat round the table; their father had gone out an hour and was feeding the horses at the Strandigerhof, whilst Hinnerk Elsen went to church like the respectable man he was. The children quarrelled or cried or built castles in the air. Little Hans had fallen asleep and lay on the ground; Christmas Eve was already over for him. Antje had gone out. When even that afternoon no cakes and apples had arrived, she thought in her impatience that none would be coming and that they were forgotten at the Strandigerhof as well as by Frisius and Haller and Heim. She went out quietly, scolding and talking to herself, and towards evening came to the neighbourhood of Westdorf and Hindorf, and began to beg. She went from one farm to another in the falling snow; she entered the great porches where the darkness filled the

corners and the whole of the background, and then, standing at the door, she sang the Christmas hymn with her powerful voice —

“Praise God, you Christians, all at once,  
Before His mercy’s throne;  
For us He opened heaven’s height,  
And gave to us His son.”

Once she forgot herself and sang the New Year’s hymn, and a second time she forgot herself and sang the hymn for the dead. The children came out of the brightly lit room, the light fell on their fair heads, and they stood and laughed but did not dare to go to the door; from within sounded merriment, and the light streamed out, and there was the pleasant odour of the Christmas tree and cakes. When the children approached, holding their parents’ hands, and saw the tall woman with her sad, wavering eyes, and her beautiful vigorous face, they were afraid. The parents were nearly all acquainted with her, they knew of the poor creature’s long years of grief, and they said, “Antje, have you come? Come in, Antje!” She laughed and said she had no time, and shifted from one foot to the other, and her eyes stole timidly to the corners and up at the great dark beams above the porch. They gave her bread and bacon or half and whole groschens. She nodded her head, and said, “Yes, yes —” but would not stay longer and went on.

Once, in a house where she was not known, the young wife who had her first baby on her arm, asked her if she had children. She laughed and said, “Yes, a great many;” then she got nuts and cakes, and the little one on his mother’s arm piled the dainties in the basket, crowing and stretching out his arms. The young wife wondered at this strange beggar who sang and laughed, and yet was so terribly in earnest. When the huge basket — it is of the kind they call a Danish basket — and all her big pockets were full, she set out home. On her way she sang the rest of her carol before the houses she had only sung the first verses. She went through the village singing.

When she entered the house, the children were sitting round the Christmas tree. Bertha and Karsten held it firm. Dora held the kitchen lamp between the twigs, first in one place and then in another, and so indicated the candles they were not rich

enough to possess. They all looked very grave and serious, as if they were grown-up people at their daily task.

Antje, as usual, began to count the children while she was still standing at the door —

“One, two — Oh, where is Fritz?”

Fritz was striding across the heath on his way to heaven. At first he had waited for Antje's return, then he had pressed his nose against the frost-covered window, and had looked by turns to Heim's house and to the schoolhouse, but the houses were quite still and nothing stirred. Then he turned round to the table and said, holding his head in a magnificent way peculiar to him —

“I am going to heaven!”

Reimer Witt cut his children's hair in a way of his own; he took an earthenware milk-bowl, turned it upside down over the head and cut away with short vigorous cuts all the hair which showed below the rim of the bowl. All round the bright fair hair was of exactly the same length. On his head, shorn in this fashion, Bertha pressed the old foxskin cap which was the common property of the children. Then she let him run away, certain that he would soon get afraid of the darkness or the cold, and run back.

But he was in bitter earnest. Even then he took life very seriously, and he will grow into a very reliable man. On the other side of the road he climbed up the dunes, cast a glance to the left, where the light from Telsche Spieker's kitchen shone over the heath, climbed across the wall and stepped down into the deep snow. He worked his way forward boldly and courageously, he clenched his teeth together and was proud that they chattered. His hair stood out over his forehead, and his eyes looked defiantly from under it into the darkness. There was nothing to be seen but some stars above and immediately before his eyes the snowflakes, which advanced out of the darkness and flew against him like a swarm of clustering white gnats. He looked up questioningly. The greater part of the sky was covered with clouds, but he could see plainly the place where the moon was holding its court behind the high grey walls. Pale stars stood on each side and showed the approach. Fritz had never seen that before. What did he want in the heaven? He could find on the earth what he longed for —

food and play. But since the heath lay before him in mist and darkness, and the shining door stood high above the earth, he nodded his round head, let his teeth chatter, and went fearlessly along towards the broad approach. He was not afraid, but he grew tired. After he had struggled for an hour or so with the soft snow and the uneven surface, he was very weary. On the left the wood retreated, the heath ended, there was a steep slope, and before him lay the deep, wide March. A cold wind came above the wood and drove the clouds westward, and chased the heavy masses of mist over the heath and the March into the inhospitable Watt. The child opened his eyes wide with astonishment, and looked at a new country. The clear moonlight lay on the low roofs with its white glimmer. Below them, as if from under great white brows, the windows shone with their Christmas lights. The trees stood on the white surface covered with white rime. Between the fields ran the straight line of the ice-covered trenches, as plainly as if drawn with a bright pencil. Then he thought that he must have arrived at his goal, for the whole land was made of silver and the houses were all the large wide farms of the March. Then he chanced to look at the sky. All the clouds had vanished and every veil was drawn away. The gleaming and sparkling of the countless distant lights, the whole radiant cold splendour of the universe of stars, showered its numberless glowing arrows into his eyes. There above—heaven was there. Not here below. Everything was as still as death around. No sound came from the endless broad space. The cold fingers of the wind touched his body which was warm and moist from his exertions. He was overcome by fear—a sudden, dreadful fear. The whole heaven seemed to break in upon his soul. He turned round and ran back across the heath. He grew more and more tired, and his breath came quickly, and in gasps. Every step was laborious. Who would find him to-morrow? They would not find him. The snow would drift over his footsteps, the snow would cover him. Who would dream of looking for him on the heath? They would find what was left in the spring. His hands were frozen and hurt him dreadfully. They were like burning ice, so stiff and hot and heavy. He had half-closed his eyes, but they were open enough to let fall one heavy drop after another. His round cheeks, which used to be so brilliantly red, had grown pale, his mouth was compressed,

but it quivered, though no sound issued from his lips. He was already in a dream. Once he fell down, but it seemed to me as if he were lifted up by the children of his own size. They wore white garments, and they surrounded him. He had lost the power of wondering at it; everything had grown indifferent to him. He cared no longer what the broad light was that he saw on the other side of the wall, but he went up to it as if something drew him. He got right over the wall, fell down on the other side, staggered between the wooden crosses up to the light, and did not notice that the light issued from a child who stood at the church door in a white garment. Immediately afterwards everything was covered with the figures of children, the path and the Strandiger monument, and even the gravestones leaning against the wall. No footstep could be heard though they moved quickly, and their white robes fluttered in the wind. They met together from the two sides and went down the path. Two of them supported little Fritz. He walked between them stammering, his eyes half-closed, his face hot and red; they were all snow-white, and he wore his old grey jacket. He was half-conscious where he was and half-dreaming. They went through the gate and down to the village. On the way Anna Haller met them. She walked in her dainty way on the path at the side and passed them. Fritz wondered that she did not notice all the brightness which surrounded him. He wanted to call her, but he could not. When they came to Heim Heiderieter's house they all raised their hands in silence and made the sign of blessing. They blessed the Heidehof which stood on the left and the schoolhouse on the right — Christmas hymns were sounding from its windows — and Eschenwinkel down below. At this point the one who seemed their leader pointed to Heim's house. They led the little boy up the hill, and he could hardly keep on his feet. They opened lightly the upper half of the door and looked inside, and were just tall enough to see over it, but no taller. The scent from the cowshed came to them, warm and pleasant, and they could hear the happy noise made by the red cow. Old memories of Bethlehem returned to them. They entered, crept quietly across the floor, and, by the light which came from their own faces, they laid the little boy at the end of the low manger, just behind the door. Everything is still the same in the Heidehof as it was that night.

They went out and laughed. Telsche Spieker was alone in the house, and she sat angrily in her room. She was vexed with Heim. Was there any use in looking after this man's house? Besides, what was there to look after? Had she not always wanted a house full of people and work from morning till night — a household which would go forward and not back? No, it was hardly a post of honour to be Heim Heiderieter's housekeeper.

Telsche Spieker was angry. She was not angry with Heim, but with herself. In the twilight she had been leaning over the half-door and thinking of Reimer Witt. Then she had looked across to his house and seen how the children were lighting the Christmas tree with the lamp.

"They can't go on like this. But what have I to do with Reimer Witt and his children? What a sad Christmas evening! This wretched house where I have spent the last twenty years, where there has been no work and no sense and no happiness. And the seven children up there! And when he comes home there is no warm room, not even a warm hearth. May God be good to him! I have earned two thousand marks in the last twenty years with labour enough. Shall I throw it away on the Witt children? That's what it would come to. I know the world! And I shall take care!"

Shaking her head and talking to herself, as people do who are much alone, she lit the lamp and sat down by the stove, which was heated from the kitchen. She took the Bible from the shelf which had been its place for two hundred years; then she sat down and read the story of Christ's birth; she held the book some distance from her, for she was growing long-sighted. She was already about forty and had looked a great deal over the wide spaces of the heath. When she came to the place which said "There on the plain were the heavenly hosts," she heard some one knocking at the window with light, timid fingers, and immediately afterwards the same knocking came on the door into the passage; she heard many gentle steps, and in the passage itself light laughter. She held her breath and listened, but she still looked at the book at the same words: the heavenly hosts. Then she made a sudden movement, stood up and went to the passage. All was in darkness, but to the left of the door, in the cowshed, she heard the loud breathing of a child, fast asleep. The animals were chewing the cud and this

sound was strangely distinct. Everything else was silent, as silent as if the whole world were listening to the child's breathing.

Telsche Spieker went back into the room. She lit the lantern with a trembling hand; then she went out again and opened carefully the door of the cowshed. There lay Fritz Witt in the manger at her feet. He lay crouched together and rolled up like a hedgehog; his head was so covered by his arms that only the hair showed. But she recognized him by it, for no one cut hair so vigorously as Reimer Witt. She recognized also the trousers he wore, for she had mended them a few days ago. She stood for awhile, listened to his breathing, and looked at the confused little heap of misery. Then she said, impatiently, "There he lies! But there's nothing to be seen of the heavenly host. I suppose he was too dirty for them." She laid down the lantern, took the child in her arms, carried him into the room, and laid him on the table near the stove. The heavenly hosts stood round the Heidehof.

She was still a moment in doubt; her eyes were fixed, thoughtfully and sadly, on the sleeping child. She thought of the woman who lay in the churchyard under the snow. As she thought of her, her face grew thoughtful and earnest and brave. She went to the window-seat and came back with the writing materials; she wrote bending over the table, while she stood between the child and the Bible — wrote in immense letters covering the whole sheet of paper —

"Telsche Spieker has rebelled against her post as housekeeper to Herr Heiderieter. He can milk and dung himself. She wishes him happiness and good health, which he has, and also industry and a good wife, which he hasn't as yet.

"**TELSCHE SPIEKER.**

"Herr Heiderieter's housekeeper, now housekeeper to Reimer Witt in Eschenwinkel."

Then she attended to the stove in the big room, put out the light, took her feather bed, wrapped the boy up in it, and stepped to the door. She locked it, and put the key as usual above the door between the thatched roof and the beams. "It is a good thing," she thought, "that he is not at home, or else

he would fill my ears with complaints and coax me till I gave in." Treading slowly and heavily, and holding her body bent back, she went down the Sandway. The falling snow covered up her footsteps as if she had never been in the Heidehof.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE new year had come, and people were beginning it just as the children of Eschenwinkel went on the fresh ice on the Wehl. Dwenger's boys, always courageous and reckless, had made a slide in the early morning, which went over one corner into the reeds. It had rung, and cracked, and creaked, and given them some bleeding scratches, but they proved themselves heroes, and that was the main thing. Schütt's children tripped up and down on the bank, their noses blue and their arms buried up to the elbows in their trousers pockets; they pointed out to each other the dark gloomy depths under the clear crystal, shook their heads at the Dwengers, and did not venture to make a bold step forward. About eleven, Schoolmaster Haller appeared. Then he went in front, and they followed him, big and little, brave and timid. He advanced in stately fashion — he weighed two hundred pounds at that time — not unlike the course of the world treading courageously on the path of destiny.

For a whole month the children went down the dunes in their play hours, and every time they came out of the school door they had to put their hands over their eyes, the sunlight was so dazzling over the white land. This month was full of sunshine and the happy shouts of children.

Heim Heiderieter looked gloomy. He saw his household comfort destroyed. There was no one to attend to his cow-shed, and he himself was uncomfortable. He was looking out for a housekeeper. He did not want one from the village and the near neighbourhood, so he advertised in the newspaper, but found no one suitable. Still the month of sunshine was sunshine to him too.

In the last days of January he got a letter from Frau Möller; she used once to keep the Mönchshof, but now in her old days she lived on the town market-place, nearly opposite the Mönchs-

hof, and looked out of her window to see if she could find any one to help. Heim Heiderieter had been her darling, even when he was only in the second class. She had played the mother to him, had often fed him, later on had scolded him at times, and recently had had serious thoughts of getting him married ; during the last winter she had seen him only too often leaving the Mönchshof and crossing the market-place on his quick brown horse. She knew the shortcomings of his purse, as well as those of his character.

Frau Möller, of Mönchshof, was well known in the whole neighbourhood. She was neat and plump, she was clever, she was capable, and always ready to help ; it was she who wrote to Heim now, to say that she had found a girl who, she thought, would manage his modest housekeeping, and would not be exacting.

“ For you can’t expect too much, dear Heim ; your house-keeping is a little bare, and you yourself have some faults.” That was the substance of her letter.

Then Heim harnessed his horse and went to town through the sunshine and the dazzling snow. He drank two glasses of grog in the Mönchshof because of the cold ; then he felt in his best mood, and crossed the market-place with firm, proud tread ; he nodded his greetings to the window he knew so well, and entered the warm, cheerful room.

First of all, as is the custom here in the country, he talked to his bright plump friend of quite different things ; of her only son Christian, who owned the big Geesthof outside on the Witten Knee ; of last Friday’s market, of the last washing, and the peat seller, who hadn’t been round. Then suddenly she stood up, opened the door, and called into the kitchen —

“ Eva! Come in! Herr Heiderieter is here.”

Immediately a dark girl appeared in the door, carrying the rattling tea-tray ; she was tall and strong, with a well-made round head and beautiful dark hair ; she was well over twenty. She wore a brown velvet blouse with a low collar, small white wristbands and a black skirt. Heim remembers that even to-day.

“ Do you see, Heim ? ” Heim certainly saw. “ This is Eva Walt. She will be pleased to be your housekeeper.”

The tea-tray was set down ; Eva Walt had her face turned

from the window, and she was looking downwards; she made a slight bow to Herr Heiderieter. He was silent.

"Will you bring a few cakes, Eva? I will see if he eats them. It is a good sign when gentlemen don't despise a little cake. Fast people never eat cake."

Heim recollected himself. "But, aunt — "

The stranger was already back again and offered him the plate. He took it and said hesitatingly —

"I cannot believe that you would like my simple house and our lonely village — and then there is so much work — "

"Why not? Because she looks so nice?"

"Where is your home, Fräulein Walt?"

"I come from near Marburg, sir." She had a deep, soft voice.

Heim leaned back in his chair and tried to appear at ease. When you are looking for a housekeeper you ought to impress people with your dignity.

"I don't know if you understand properly what the life and work are like in a place such as mine."

"Don't you understand that I have explained to her exactly what everything is and how it is managed?"

Heim bit deep into the cake.

"Frau Möller has told me all, sir; what the Hof is like and the daily work. You have a young man, haven't you, who does odd jobs? There are six cows to milk and sometimes there's another hired man at table. I think, sir, I can manage quite well if I may ask for advice at the beginning. I know just what the work is on a place like yours, but I don't know exactly the ways of this country."

Heim drew a deep breath. "To tell you the truth, Fräulein, I don't understand what can induce you to come to such a poor situation. You have culture and manners that might bring you good wages in the town. What can you care for in the country, in my little house?" He drew himself up somewhat. "I think you will make my home much more cheerful than I have been used to, but I am afraid you will soon leave me because the work is too much for you and the house too quiet."

For the first time she looked at him directly. Her clever dark eyes dwelt on him gravely.

"I am a poor girl," she said, "and have lived through many hardships. I would like to have quiet work every day and

enough of it. I have talked everything over with Frau Möller. I know the work and I know what wages you give."

Here was the difficulty. Heim sighed with relief and said —

"And you, aunt, do you think Fräulein Walt ought to come to me? Tell me, how did you get to know her?"

"Eva was in Hamburg with some relatives of mine, and she wanted a place. My maid happened to be ill. I asked her to help me. That was all."

"Well then, you will take the responsibility!"

"Gladly, my dear fellow, so far as concerns Eva. I wonder you make so many difficulties. Am I a practical woman or am I not?"

"More practical than any one, aunt." He stood up and, as the girl passed him, he held out his hand and said, "I hope you won't regret it."

"No! I am glad you trust me. I will go with you to-day, sir."

It is very pleasant to be called "sir" in such a respectful tone by such a strong, beautiful girl. But one must have the necessary self-confidence.

On the way, as they sat side by side, they talked happily together. Heim held the reins and took the lead in the conversation. He talked about the making of the country and the history of the people who lived in it. She listened to him attentively, and looked down on the March and out to the sea. He talked of the people he knew, of Frisius and Haller, of the Witts and the Landts, of Peter Nahwer, who was not allowed to smoke, and of Pellwormer, who could not speak. She guided the conversation by skilful questions, as she might have guided a vehicle by a pull of the reins now and then. He saw that she was both clever and warm-hearted.

Then he began to speak of the Heidehof in his cheerful but exaggerated fashion.

"The Geestland," he said, "lies too high. It is so high that the rain runs away underneath. The Marchland is too low; it is only on beautiful June days that it shows above the water. For the lower ground I have got a special kind of long-legged cows, and because of the abundance of water, as I suppose Darwin would tell us, their legs are always growing longer

and longer. On the higher ground I have got a flock of sheep from the Lüneburger heath. You will have read how, when the heath was cultivated, they advertised in the newspapers to see if they could find any place in the whole Fatherland bare and dry enough for the flock. I was the only one who made an offer."

"And the Heidehof?"

"The Heidehof," he said, "has either been a Hun's grave or else a hole for cooking. People dispute about it. Certainly it is a hole in the heath with a pointed straw roof above it like those they use to cover a pile of sheaves. The straw has gradually turned into heath, too. Christoph Dwenger — you will make his acquaintance and not be surprised at it — was mowing the heath this autumn, and he mowed on without seeing or suspecting anything till his scythe went right into my chimney. Now I have put up a sign: 'The roof of Heim Heiderieter's house begins here.'"

"You have studied, sir?"

He turned to her and looked in her dark eyes. "I am sure you know me better than I know myself. You have heard everything from Frau Möller. Yes, I was in the grammar school and in Täbingen five years; but when I ought to have taken an examination — did Frau Möller tell you this? — something happened to my eyes, so that the country couldn't please them any more, and I had to come home."

"And you are not going away again?"

He looked over the village which lay before them in the hollow and across the heath to the Heidehof.

"I mean to stay here," he said earnestly, "and to try to cultivate my small inheritance — there it lies in the evening light — and if I have anything else, to improve that too. It is always difficult to begin," he said, sighing and thinking of his writing-table and last year's potato crop. "Do you see the Heidehof? The clever old house has asked the sun for some brightness and beauty just to celebrate your coming; its big hood suits it very well, white with the snow like that, and its eyes look over the road, sparkling with the gold of the sun. I hope you will be happy in this house. Let us get down. We have arrived."

"Thank you, sir."

He looked after her as she went up to the door.

"If only she would not always call him 'sir!'"

The sun cast a long, friendly glance on the Heidehof; then it closed its golden eye and went down into the sea.

Eva Walt stood alone in the room which had been Telsche Spieker's. She went to the window, opened it, and looked out across the heath; she looked long and thoughtfully at the wood and the Wodanshill which rose up there as white as the heath. Then she drew back, closed the window, glanced at the flowers on the window-sill, on the old pictures — pictures of religious subjects — on the dark wall and the clean white bed. When she had seen it all she sat down on the chair by the table, looked round shyly once again, her fresh face crimsoning as she did so; she laid both arms on the table, hid her face upon them, and wept.

For a whole month the sun shone brilliantly on the snow, but at the Strandigerhof it was dreary weather.

Lena received every Monday a packet of books from Berlin. Then she vanished for three days, reappearing only at dinner. After three days she went about the house with flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes. She had breathed the air of Berlin, and it roused her. She spoke to every one with the same excitement; wanted to ride across the heath with Andrees, and even tried to rouse Hinnerk Elsen from his imperturbable calm. Towards the end of the week she would spend her time standing at the window. She would go out for a walk alone through the snow, along the dyke, look over the sea, turn round, look across the heath, and come home; then she would shut herself up and cry. The next morning Anna Witt would find her best clothes spread out and marked with tears.

On the Sunday morning she came to her brother with kindling eyes.

"Can you do nothing to make him come with us to Berlin? Do something that will make this house hateful to him so that he will leave it."

Franz Strandiger passed his hand over his brow and looked down gloomily.

"Well, well, I will see, Lena. I have a plan, but I must be careful not to make him too angry; it might be difficult to pay the rent exactly at the right time."

Lena Strandiger left the room, and his mother came and sat down at the writing-table; even in her old age she was

learning to understand the complicated bookkeeping of an estate. She took her spectacles off and called her son. She pointed to one page; it held the accounts of Eschenwinkel—the repairs, the rent, and the interest on money expended—and she said—

“ You must get that page empty. Have no pity.”

She spoke about the lease and the improvements which were necessary, and, as she was leaving the room, she asked—

“ How much money have the Landts? Didn’t you tell me once, a long time ago, that they had forty thousand marks each? Think of the first of November, Franz.”

Andrees Strandiger often wandered restlessly on the heath. He made but a gloomy companion. In the evening he sat in the big parlour. He had been accustomed to sit there once with his mother and father; he thought of many things, especially he pondered one question: “ How can a man sell his home, a part of his own life and his own soul? Was it necessity which drove him away? ”

His mind was always traversing the same round: “ I have let the Hof because I want to enjoy life with Lena Strandiger. Well, then, let us go into the world.” But the Man of whom Frisius had spoken seemed to stand in his way and say to him, “ Go thou also into my vineyard.”

Then again he thought: “ I will ask Maria Landt to become my wife, my comrade. I will learn to think like her, and to live as she does. I will work for my home and lead a simple life.” But when he had gone some distance along this path he seemed to see written in the sand: “ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”

He avoided the Heidehof and the vicarage. He walked for hours, making a great détour round the village and over the heath to the dyke; then he stood and looked out, expanding his chest and enjoying the air. “ I am at home! At home! ” When he had been away he had despised and made fun of it. Now, as he felt its dreamy sadness, he loved it more and more every day. It was like a woman stretching out her arms to him with eager eyes. She caught at his heart and embraced him in her arms. “ Stay with me! ”

The women went on living their own life. Frau Strandiger spent the greater part of the day in her armchair by the window. She was almost blind: she could tell no more than if

the day were dark or sunny. She sat there and listened to the children playing by the Wehl. She never finished her knitting. It was always falling into her lap, as if some one thrust it down and said to her, "Leave it alone." If any one spoke to her, she began to talk of her son; he walked and spoke like his father, and was just as reliable and capable. Only he was not venturesome; he would never have anything to do with the Watt and Flackelholm.

"I am a weak woman," she said. "But he will make the Hof a splendid place. What is he doing with the houses in Eschenwinkel?"

Andrees appeared on the threshold; he wanted to talk over his troubles with Maria.

"It is so, isn't it, Andrees? You will make your father's estate what he left it."

He nodded, and said aloud: "Yes, mother!" He went up to her and stroked her white hair; he stared out across the Wehl and did not dare to look at the table where Maria Landt sat; then he went away, feeling as if he had another wound in a heart already torn.

No one dared to tell the old lady, "The Hof is let. Andrees is going to Berlin."

Franz Strandiger came up every morning to ask after his aunt, but he often forgot to talk to her. He would sit opposite to Maria and discuss things that happened. He talked carelessly enough, but she felt he wanted something from her. Her pale face would grow still paler and she would rise and quietly leave the room. In her bedroom she would moan to herself and fall on her knees; then she would start up and turn to her table and the book where she always sought help and comfort; she could not find it, and she would go back restless and miserable, with a changed face and absent eyes.

A month after New Year the first spring storm came roaring over the land. The first day it came the children were skating on the Wehl; it tore the caps from their heads and blew them into the dry reeds by the bank, where they came to grief. On the second day the ice was shining with moisture, and they were banished altogether. Schoolmaster Haller stood bareheaded near Heim's barn door, calling to them and making signs.

Ingeborg Landt remained alone on the Wehl. Now she let herself be driven on by the strong, fierce wind, and again she

struggled against it. When she let herself go her face was quiet and thoughtful, but when she struggled she half-closed her eyes, frowning, and throwing her shoulders back. Her eyes were earnest beyond her years and she talked to herself.

"Maria was crying last night. If he thought as much about me as he does of Maria, I would get him and keep him, but he doesn't look at me; I am only a child to him. I am stronger and better looking and have more courage than Lena Stran-diger. Maria loses heart when it is a matter of going against the wind. It's just then that I feel bravest. She cries, but I — I think how I could alter things. I can do nothing but show my love to him and my teeth to her. I could bear it if Maria won him. Then I would go away from here. But I can't bear that she should take him away and not reverence him, and want other men. I can't bear it. He ought to see that I am stronger and have more courage than either of them. My dear sister! But they don't suit each other!" Her eyes shone and her cheeks grew hot; her heart was burning.

Franz met her as she was crossing the Hof with her skates in her hand; she laughed at him, nodded, and said —

"Will you go up to Maria? I think she likes to see you."

When she met Andrees on the stairs she stopped him and, though he looked forbidding, she said, breathlessly —

"I can't stay inside. It is so lovely out, so wild and fresh. Won't you take me with you?"

"On the heath?"

"Oh, that would be lovely!"

She went past her pale sister like a whirlwind. "I am going on the heath with Andrees." She snapped her fingers at Lena's room. "I am going on the heath with Andrees."

They went. It was just like the time eight years ago when he had gone with Maria. Only then it had been lovely, clear autumn weather, and they had had the hearts of children. Now a raw west wind was blowing behind them, cold and wet. It roared against them and blew between them, bringing a cold shower of rain; it filled the small hollows on the ground with dirty water from the melted snow, so that they had to separate and go round, and it lamented and howled over misfortunes and wasted days.

They were both silent and listened to it, bending their heads. At the Wodanshill they turned round. Then the storm beat

against them and seemed to fling, as it were, wet fragments from its torn, waving mantle. They raised their heads and looked up. Their natures were alike in this, that they always felt more courage against the wind.

Ingeborg's eyes were looking towards the dyke, and they glittered like steel. The kerchief which she wore round her head was torn back as if by some one's hand, and the same hand strewed drops of water like pearls on her fair hair.

Then he looked at her and recognized again that she was quite different from her sister. Maria was true but weak, Ingeborg true and strong. Was she true? He did not know her at all. He had always thought of Maria and Maria only.

"Do you like to come with me this way, against the wind?"

She held her head back and looked at him, and he saw how heavily she breathed.

The wind took a still firmer hold, it tore back her clothes and flung each fold on her limbs, it roared against her and shook her body and soul, and roused all those thoughts which had been, as it were, asleep and dreaming in her mind.

"Do you like coming with me?"

"Where are we going?"

"Farther and farther, Ingeborg! This is the first happy hour I have had at home. Aren't you afraid? Won't you get tired?"

She laughed loudly and bitterly. "I am not afraid, but—" She stretched her arms out before her with her hands clenched, and gnashed her teeth in helpless anger.

He felt that she was nearer to him than any one else. It was as if the veils were torn away, the mists vanished, and the doors opened, and he saw in the distance his hope and his true path.

"What must I do?" he cried aloud.

"What you want—"

"Maria says: 'God's will;' Magdalena says: 'Her will.'"

"Your own will," she said aloud.

"My own will tears me in two."

"You must take God's will and your own will, you must take your courage like a hammer and beat them into one. You will have on one side God's image and on the other your own handwriting. Then you will be worth something."

He stood still and stared at her. "How do you know that? You are still so young?"

"I have been trying to think why we are all so miserable. Maria has no will of her own, and you have not God's will!"

"You do my heart good. I must talk to you more often. If I only knew that you would stand by me."

"Why don't you ask me, Andrees? Open your eyes!" She placed both hands before her face, to hide as it were the flames which seemed to start from her eyes and cheeks.

They went obliquely down the slope of the dunes. Under the dunes by the Wehl Eva Walt was drawing water, and Maria stood by her. Maria happened to look up and see her sister's face. Then she went to Eschenwinkel with Eva Walt.

The storm leapt howling over the dyke, rushed across the Wehl, and hurled itself on the edge of the heath.

Ingeborg looked at Andrees. "Now it really will be spring!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

ESCHENWINKEL had its winter visitor: hunger crept from house to house. It opened first one door and then another without a sound, and sat down by the stone hearth where a miserable fire burnt under the kettle.

For eight weeks the men had had no work. Rain, and frost, and water, and snow, had prevented them from working in the fields. In previous years several weeks' employment had been provided by threshing the corn at the Hof; this year, however, Franz Strandiger had brought labourers from the upper Geest, who were cheaper than the March people.

"He has no pity for us," the women said to Maria. "He does not know how much trouble we have. Where can we get bread and flour? Not to speak of bacon! There are nine of us at table every day, and the cold makes the children as hungry as wolves when they come from school."

They did not say any more; they did not speak of the daily misery they endured. Their poverty was of the humble and submissive kind. But when they spoke of Franz Strandiger they looked up, gloomy and bitter, and hid nothing.

"He will take away our potato ground next year; he told Peter Schütt so."

"He will not do that," said Maria quickly.

"He does not care either for God or man; he will take even our houses. Before two years have gone there will be fields here with his cows grazing where our children are playing now. Children cost money, and cows bring it in."

"He will not do it," she said again, and her heart beat terribly.

"He will do it. It will all be as we say. We know him."

"Yes," said the widow Thiel, "they are right, there is no good in him. It would be best for us if he could get a wife who has some feeling for poor people." The old woman looked

at Maria's face with twinkling eyes. "I tell you," she said, "that is the only hope."

Maria went away. She had taken two thalers with her, intending to leave them in the two houses where there was most distress. She went in at the Dwengers'. It was the third house after the Witts'. The wife had been a servant at the Strandigerhof when Maria Landt was a child. Coming from the city as she did, Maria regarded the Strandigerhof with astonished eyes; this girl was so strong and blooming that the sight of her was the first and strongest impression the child received.

The woman had seven children now and three were going to school. The children had all suffered from rickets and it had been a long time before they could walk. At one period all the three youngest were unable to walk. Two of them were crawling up and down on the sand-strewn floor and could not stand up. The husband, Christoph Dwenger, was a capable, industrious workman, but he had occasional bouts of drinking. When the fit came on him, which happened every five or six weeks, he drank all the money he had in his pocket, sometimes a whole week's wages, he quarrelled, talked and shouted, beat his wife and children, and behaved like a beast; later on, years after, he entered the order of the Good Templars; they have done a great deal of good in our district, made many cold hearths warm, and given happiness to many wretched women and children. Enrolled in this brotherhood he has spent the second portion of his life temperately, quietly, and happily; he has seen his wife's health return, and his children grow into good men.

Dwenger's wife received Maria with a doubtful, anxious look; she had worn that expression ever since she first learnt she was the wife of a drunkard. At one time she had been very proud, especially proud of her tall, strong husband. She was all the more wretched and downcast when the drink gained a hold upon him.

"Where is your husband, Liese?"

"He has gone to the town. It's the cattle market to-day. He is hoping to earn a few shillings as a driver." Her pale face was full of distress. "How will he come home?"

"It's a long time since he had any work?"

"Franz Strandiger has nothing done, no winnowing or threshing. There will be no more work at the dyke."

There was that name again. Maria felt in her pocket. The woman saw it and bent over her youngest boy. She said —

“We are all well, God be thanked. If we were ill we would need help. Sickness eats up the money and makes people humble; but as long as we are well — I think he will soon come back and bring a few shillings with him. He often earns good wages.”

Maria Landt left her money in her pocket and went out sadly. As she was going the woman leaned against the door-post and said mournfully —

“They were saying yesterday that Franz Strandiger was going to marry. Do you know anything about it?”

Maria turned round. “I don’t know,” she said, and went on.

As she returned home, creeping along the Wehl, she thought of the night; it was already lurking among the reeds and sending its gloomy breath above the water. Once again she would be unable to sleep. She would lie, with open eyes, thinking of what she had to do. “It will help Eschenwinkel. It will startle Andrees. It will drive him out of Lena’s power to Ingeborg. Then too, the old lady can have peace.”

But she shuddered at the thought of doing what was necessary. In her terror she tried to go another way — to Andrees — but that path was blocked. Her mind wavered to and fro. It seemed feeling about in the darkness, as Frau Strandiger did when she crossed the room with hands stretched out before her.

The next morning the March was covered by heavy mists which shut out every ray of light. The sun was hidden in reek and vapour and stood on the edge of the wood above the heath.

Reimer Witt was going to the Strandigerhof. He was a broad-shouldered man of middle height, with strong, vigorous limbs, but he walked somewhat stiffly and his shoulders were bent with heavy work. So far as knowledge and ideas were concerned he was a very simple man, but he was a true Christian, and had, besides, a certain inborn tact; he had thus in himself something strong and chivalrous, and his kindness made him beloved everywhere. His wife’s long illness and her death had been a terrible grief; the sad circumstances at home which had followed her funeral like a part of the mourning had bewildered him for some time and put him at a loss. But his true

Christian feeling had kept him straight. He had let his beaten vessel drive into that harbour. Now he was mending it and fitting it out anew, and already listening to the wind and waves outside. Since Telsche Spieker had looked after his house, everything was quite clean and well managed.

On the path under the elms Andrees met him, and they both stood still.

"I was coming to get some money," said Reimer Witt. "I have dug out eight hundred yards of the trench; that makes thirty marks."

Andrees looked gloomily on the ground. "That is so, Witt — you know that I have let the place."

"Must I go to your cousin?"

"Yes. But I wanted to say —" he felt in his waistcoat pocket for a gold piece. "You have had so many expenses this winter —"

His eyes passed up and down the road like a hound's when it has lost the scent.

"I was coming to get the money I have earned for the eight hundred yards." Reimer spoke harshly and coldly. If the man was no longer his employer, what was he? Only a stranger.

"True — but I knew your wife well and you too —"

"That is all done with now. You are going out into the world, I have my work, and Rieke is in the churchyard."

He turned away and went treading stiffly up to the front door.

Franz Strandiger was sitting at his writing-table in the small room on the left; he was reckoning up the expenses of the threshing which was just over. He knew the man well who stood at the door, cap in hand. As a boy he had had many happy talks with him, in the stable in winter, by the ditches in summer. They had been special friends, for in figure and character they were both proud and resolute, as people usually are by the North Sea. But those times were past. Franz Strandiger was now the master here, emphatically the master. So Reimer had to be a servant. Franz spoke in the cold indifferent tone which the Eschenwinklers so disliked —

"I wish people would not disturb me before ten o'clock. What do you want?"

Reimer Witt briefly stated his errand.

"Come another time; I must look into it first."

"You need only give a glance at the map."

"I'll tell you something, Witt. You've been too long at this place. People like you, who think themselves cleverer than the master, are not needed."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, do you see — if you want me to make it still plainer — I was once agent on an estate — Rübenbau — where I got to know a quite different sort of workmen."

"Yes! You mean the kind who let themselves be treated like dogs all day, and are quite content if they can tell their beads at night."

Franz Strandiger rose. It became plain that they were both stern and angry men.

"That is my idea of Christianity — that a man should lead a quiet, peaceable life, without grumbling where Providence has placed him."

"I don't know, Herr Strandiger, if Providence has placed you here. And I don't know where you get that idea of Christianity. It is just suited to a good warm room like this, and a man whom Providence, as you call it, has placed in a comfortable position. My Christianity wears a smock frock, and has horny hands as I have, from hard labour."

"Ridiculous, perverted ideas!"

"You think it is because I have not learnt much. Well! I have had my grammar school too. First of all, in the year seventy, I went to France. The war made some people rough, but it made me thoughtful. Then for another thing I went to church. Not often. Sunday is the only day we have for house and home. But when I went, I understood the words as they really were, the words 'brother' and 'charity' and 'pure heart' and the parable of the rich man. Be willing to help, it tells us. It was then I took my sister in my house. I understood those words in the sense that people use them. And, last of all, I have had to learn all that is meant by sorrow. That taught me a good deal! What do you know of it?"

He turned away, his hand on the door handle.

"The Strandigerhof will have no more work for you in the future, and I am going to do away with Eschenwinkel."

Reimer Witt laughed. "Do you see; that is your religion! Christianity says: Help your brother and be kind to him! Your religion says: Help your money-bag and your wrath!"

They stood facing each other.

"Go out! I say."

He went out slowly.

In the passage, close by the old grandfather's clock, Maria Landt was standing.

"What has happened, Reimer? Why do you look like that?"

They neither of them saw that Franz Strandiger was standing at the open door.

"I wanted to get my money; instead of that we have been telling each other what we think of God in heaven."

"Reimer! Reimer, I beg you. Speak to Andrees!"

"To him! I might as well speak to this clock. What is he? Is he anything here at all? He is one of God's idlers."

"Reimer!" she said. Her fear showed like a flame in her eyes, a flame blown in the wind.

"Reimer," she said, "you know there is One who can soften hard hearts."

"No, Maria! They stay as they are. They eat well all their lives, and when they have eaten well, they have good hopes of sleeping well too. They never change till they die."

"I will speak to him. I think, Reimer, I may be able to help."

"Well," he said, and shook his head meditatively, "'Take no thought' was specially written for us. If we did take thought we should feel it better to put an end to our troubles. We must reflect as little as the ball the children play with. We are flung to and fro as if we were tossed about by children, but in the end, if all goes well, we arrive in God's hand. The whole of Eschenwinkel must go! The whole of Eschenwinkel."

He went away shaking his head, and he thought when he had come to his house of all he had experienced there in eighteen years.

Franz Strandiger closed the door gently and murmured: "She will help." He looked gloomily to the door. It was not easy for him. Everything that was chivalrous and honourable in his nature rebelled, but he clenched his teeth and opened the door again.

Maria Landt was just passing and she stood still. She said nothing, but they looked at each other. He saw that she was

appealing to him, and the knowledge shook him so that he could not utter a word. He had hoped for this moment, but his strong, careless nature had been unable to realize that the moment would be so grave. She stood before him with her wide, tragic eyes.

"What are you going to do with Witt and Eschenwinkel?"

"Is your heart as much in Eschenwinkel as it was when you were fourteen?"

"Just as much!"

"It's necessary for economy's sake that the houses should be pulled down and it must be done!"

"There are other things to think of. If you only thought of economizing, you would not keep Sunday or Christmas; then you would have more days to work in till the end." Her sad voice weakened his resolve, but bitterness overcame him so suddenly and violently that his body trembled and his voice grew hoarse.

"Do you talk of Christmas? I don't know what it is. We had nothing to do with things of that sort. My mother doesn't care for them. Once I wanted to go with a boy to see his Christmas tree and I was beaten for it. When we spoke of Christmas trees my mother laughed. 'Nonsense,' she said."

All the misery of his desolate childhood seemed to rise mockingly before him.

"You could hardly be more a saint than you are. Well! I was in the same house this Christmas. Did you invite me and say 'Come and see our Christmas tree?' I stood there at the window and saw the light from your tree on the snow. No one troubled about me; no one asked about my soul; you were so certain I had none. That is why I go my own way, and it is this: I will be master. That is my whole philosophy! And no wonder!"

She had gone to the window. Her face was turned from him and she was breathing heavily. In her anguished heart there was one thought surging to and fro: "I must do it; there is no other way. I can help Andrees and Ingeborg and Eschenwinkel. And I can help him too."

He grew calmer and began to speak again, drawing a deep breath; what he said was the simple truth.

"From my childhood I have had one desire. For nearly

twenty years I have wanted this: to be master and have my own possessions. If I could do that I would be kinder. Help me! You know what I mean, Maria Landt. Let me have Christmas too. Be kind to me! It may be that I also have a soul."

"And — no other way?"

"No, no other way. If the saint's love can't go so far as that I shall remain a stone, and a good many people will stumble over me. It is in your hands."

She went past him and out of the room. When she was outside, looking for the staircase, she staggered against the clock. With her hand pressed against her forehead she listened to the beating of her heart. The clock ticked faster and faster, and it seemed as if her heart tried to keep pace with it and could not; as if it grew footsore and panted and sank down, and fell on its knees by the bridge in the Wehl, and bent over the bridge into the water. The great grey stone lay there on the green bottom and she bent down and lifted it up; it felt icy cold on her breast, but it grew warm and heavy and covered her. And the clock said: "It is striking twelve. She is dead." She lay at the bottom of the Wehl and slept, and the mermaids spread wet shrouds over her face.

Anna Witt found her fainting on the ground.

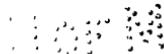
Half Eschenwinkel had met that evening in Peter Nahwer's workshop, which was also his living-room. Schütt was there and his wife, the Genthins, man and wife, the Dwengers and others. The widow Thiel sat close by the stove and held her hands on the hot surface. Peter Nahwer, with his cold pipe in his mouth, was making glue. The smell of new wood and glue penetrated through the low room. They were discussing the news of what had happened to Reimer Witt.

"It's what you might expect! Our turn will come now! It won't be long!"

"The whole of Eschenwinkel must go!"

"Yes, it will!"

The widow Thiel laid her heavy arms on the table. "I have bound the corn for fifty years. I did it following after my husband till he died; then after the boy till he had to go to France; then after other men, kind ones and harsh ones, those I knew and strangers. Now I have grown old and cold."



"You have your pension, Thielsche!" said Peter Nahwer, and sucked at his pipe. "But what must I do?" and he took the pipe after he had given it a good pull and pointed with it to his breast.

"You?" said Schütt's wife. "A dried-up old bachelor! Ask rather where we must go with all our children."

A young labourer who had served his time with the Franzern in Berlin, said with military brevity, the sort of brevity with which a soldier repeats a message —

"We must tell the Kaiser."

Peter Nahwer raised his pipe threateningly. "That's no good! He has to think of affairs that concern every one — big things. When Christian the Eighth drove through the village in 1846, Thomälen wanted to tell him that Pastor Jürgens had given his rascal of a boy a good thrashing. He boasted and told us: 'I have served in Glückstadt with the regulars and I know how to do it. Attention! Hands to your sides, three steps back, then you do it.' But he did not; the king looked away across the March and the carriage went on. It was a good thing he took the three steps back or the king would have gone over his toes. No, that is no good."

"The best thing would be if we all went to Iowa."

The suggestion gave them new material, fertile for discussion.

"I am too old!" said Peter Nahwer, and shook his head and pipe.

"I will go with you," said the widow Thiel, smoothing her apron. "I don't know why I shouldn't go; all my girls are there."

"There, on the other side, they own the ground under their feet and they can get their daily bread — quite sufficient."

"That is true. The pastor says the same. They have not only potatoes, but meat as well."

"Quite the way Luther puts it: Food, drink, house, farm, land, cattle, money —"

"No, they don't always have money or good neighbours."

"And I don't think they always have good government."

Genthin mended every spring the thatched roofs for the whole neighbourhood. At this point his wife gave him a nudge. He was by nature very quiet, his wife was small and lively and roused him up. She was a Dane. He had gone with a cattle



ship to Denmark and had got to know her there, and she was never quite at ease in German.

"Do you hear?" she said. And she turned to the others. "Genthin often say de gover'ment is not goot."

The others laughed. "Yes, you had to pay a fine because your chimney had a big hole in it."

"Show dem de letter, Genthin, vich Len' has wrote; you have it in dis pocket."

Genthin, who was nicknamed the slow, unbuttoned his coat with great deliberation. He took out a letter, put it down on the edge of the chopping-block by the stove, and then read with his eyes screwed up. "Dear mother! I can't send you money — Well, I don't need to read that. 'We milk seven cows, have twenty-six pigs and seventy fowls, and we have three good meals a day, everything we want. Dear mother! What ye shall eat? What ye shall drink? What ye shall put on? Where does it say that? We have plenty to eat and drink here. As for clothes, we don't care much about them and we have no widow Thiel — '"

The widow Thiel drew herself up and looked severely at Genthin.

"What does she say?"

"'We have no widow Thiel here,'" he read, in louder tones. "'To stand outside the windows in the evening.'"

"Ah, well! So Lena writes like that, does she? She was always impudent!"

"It is a long way off," said Dwenger's wife, who thought of her little ones.

"What do you say? A long way? We can get land and food."

"Ah! If I could only do that?" said the Franzer.

"A little land and a cow."

"Yes, land enough for a cow."

"That is what is wanting here."

The evening fell, gloomy and sad, and they separated with heavy hearts.

Maria was sitting in her room in the Strandigerhof. It had long white curtains and a bed of polished ashwood with a canopy. Maria sat at the table and read the chapter in John which tells how the Saviour took leave of his disciples. As she

bent forward the lamplight fell on her dark head. She could not understand the words. "Give; love; glorify; see." The words seemed to have no meaning; they were lifeless shadows and bewildered her. Her eyes and thoughts were fixed on the last sentence: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them." As she crouched with the lamplight on her head every single hair showed black and shining, smooth and neat; it looked as if some one might have put them in order and counted them.

Late that evening Ingeborg came into the room. When she saw the book she said with excitement —

"You shouldn't read so much. There's no good in all this reading and brooding. If you would do something to help?"

After a pause, while she walked restlessly up and down, she said —

"Reimer Witt is dismissed and Antje is ordered away. She is crying till she can be heard through the whole house."

Maria raised her eyes. "Where is Andrees?" she asked, in low tones.

"He? He is sitting with his young lady! Oh! is he a man at all? He is detestable and hateful."

She was in the wildest fury. "I will ask him this evening — from a distance, I respect myself too much to go near. I will say to him: 'Are you a man or an ape? An idiot or a Christian?' I will show him my apron strings. 'Take hold, dear little Andrees. It's dark!'"

Maria bowed her head on the book and wept aloud.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE next evening but one—it was the Saturday before Lent—Ingeborg entered the room where Maria was sitting by Frau Strandiger's bed. She signalled to her with hands and eyes. Maria turned pale and went out, for she knew what was coming.

"All the Eschenwinklers have notice. On the first of April they are to leave their houses. All the people we know have to go, young and old together. The little Witts and the Schütts—they have all to go away. And only Franz Strandiger and God know where they are going."

Maria stood in the doorway and looked before her in a dull fashion.

"Tell me, Maria, what we must do."

"Do?" She raised her head. "Yes, one must do something."

"He walks up and down the house and the farm, with his face as bold and careless as if he cared nothing for God or man. The Eschenwinklers are not men—if they were they would get him to-night and throw him in the deepest part of the Wehl."

"In the Wehl? What are you talking of? Oh, do be quiet!"

Ingeborg stormed out; her heart was hot with anger and love, and she wished to calm herself. Twice she went as far as the school, then up the Sandway to the Heidehof.

Heim Heiderieter sat at his writing-table; his hair was tidier than he had ever had it before, and his face more serious. On his left was a pile of books, histories of Holstein; on his right was a sheet of paper, holding two long columns of figures which extended from top to bottom. He had his long legs under the table, his feet against the wall, and he was reckoning up his debts and his resources; in the left-hand column were the debts as he had copied them from mortgages, etc., a long list; on the

right his possessions in house, land, cattle, money, and other things that he was not quite so certain of. At last, after much shaking of his head and many a "Well! Well!" he subtracted the sum of his debts from that of the value in hand.

There were fourteen thousand marks to the good.

He sat looking thoughtfully at the amount. Then he drew beside it a face with some likeness to his own. It was longer than his, however, and in consequence had a somewhat stupid and astonished expression, and the hair was not curly, though such hair is easy enough to draw, but stood out straight from the head, which is easier still.

When Ingeborg, in her usual informal way, came into the room without knocking, he remained sitting in the same bent position and listened to her announcement.

"What do you say to that?"

"I? I? See!" he said. He looked at her with his wide, astonished eyes and pointed to the head with its hair standing on end. "Who do you think that is? It's I? It's I! That's what I'm like inside!"

"Oh dear!"

"How can I trouble about other people? I have spent all my money and my life doing useless things. I have wasted ten thousand marks in studying! I could sit here so comfortably! It is so cheerful here. But the debts! the debts!"

She looked at him with her cool grey eyes. "You have suddenly got very silly. What books are those — there." She pointed distrustfully to the pile under the lamp.

"Histories of Holstein," he said wrathfully. "I am always wanting to write something, but I know nothing and I can't. Some one has said — I think it was Gustav Freytag — a writer must study history if he wants to have firm ground under his feet. But if you have debts! Debts! There is no firm ground then! You are up to the knees in mud. Then all the histories in the world are no good."

"What?" she said, thoroughly angry. "There's no sense in such silly whining. You only need to work hard and save. But no! that's just what you can't do — work!"

He looked up quickly, nodded his head towards the kitchen and pointed with his hand.

"Don't speak so loud! You can be heard over the whole house."

"Ah!" she said, moving in her chair, "are you afraid? That will do you good, dear Heim!" She looked round the room. "She is clean and the whole house is clean, and it seems to me that your hair is tidier than it used to be. Who knows, Heim?"

"You are mad! As mad as you always are!"

The door opened and the housekeeper came in. Her cheeks were reddened by work and her eyes shone with youth and health. Her figure was vigorous and stately and she carried it erect, but her dark head was bent.

Ingeborg stood up and held out her hand. They knew each other already and got on very well; they seemed to feel real sympathy with each other.

"Eva, tell me, what does this man do the whole day long?"

"The boy and I do what has to be done. The master is busy with his books."

Heim bent down over his accounts. He reddened when she said "the master" in Ingeborg's presence. The respect with which she said it! If he could only feel so much reverence for himself!

Ingeborg looked critically first at one and then at the other. The man at the writing-table is transparent as glass. His table is neat; his hair is tidy; his collar is clean; he himself has patched a hole on his elbow. He respects his housemate and it is on her account that he is lamenting the follies he has committed and the years he has wasted. Neither Telsche Spieker nor I could make him pull himself together and she has done it easily. It is the girl who is a riddle, strong as she is, with her dark plaited hair, her proud bearing and the humble carriage of her head. Is she true or is she playing a part? Doesn't she see that this man can be twisted round any one's little finger? Hasn't she heard that he hung on Telsche Spieker's apron strings? Doesn't she see that he will dance as pretty Ingeborg pipes? Why is she so humble and reverent and quiet? But — whether purposely or not — if she goes on in the same way she will make another man of Heim Heiderieter. She looked at Eva Walt, and had on her tongue one of her brief, hasty speeches; but her glance was met by two grave dark eyes, and she bit off her sharp speech before it was uttered; as she was going she turned round at the door. She looked at Heim by his writing-table, quiet and neat but de-

pressed, and she spoke to him with an almost maternal sweetness.

"Don't worry, Heim; I think everything will turn out well, here and at the Strandigerhof too. One must face things bravely and leave the rest to God."

Outside, as the housekeeper was accompanying her to the door, she said reflectively and with emphasis —

"I am so glad that my old friend has got you to look after his house. I am sure you understand the task you have undertaken and you will be equal to it. Yes, I know you will."

Eva Walt nodded gravely, and the two daughters of Eve separated.

At the same time, in the Strandigerhof, the door of the study opened softly. Franz Strandiger had been standing at the window in the twilight, brooding over his plans for the estate. They stood before him like misty figures begging for a real life. He wanted to buy a new steam-engine, to drain the meadows on the other side of the wood, to pull down the whole of Eschenwinkel and make a workman's barracks behind the farm buildings. And he needed money for everything. He looked angrily and gloomily into the desolate twilight. To be a capable manager, with his heart in his work, full of restless energy, master of a large, neglected estate, which could be turned into something well managed and profitable. But no money, and thus no power — only able to stand and brood here at the window with all his beautiful plans outside in the snow. He quivered with passion and anger. "I could *steal* what I need." He turned round and saw Maria Landt at the door, which she had closed lightly behind her.

"You have dismissed the Eschenwinklers. What are they going to do?"

"I can't throw money away. I can get cheaper labourers."

"But this is their home. Their children lie in the churchyard."

"And I stand here, a man who means to go forward. These people and their houses are in my way."

He had let himself be carried away by his anger; now he came up to her and spoke more quietly.

"Sit down here. I will try to explain to you that I am only human. Do you see, I am master here! I am responsible for

making rich grass grow on the meadows and good corn in the fields, that the poor cattle should disappear from the stables and a new and better breed be brought in. Frau Strandiger took care — and she was able to do it — that the men on her land should have their rights; but I want the land itself to have its rights, and, because of my small purse, the men must give way. I don't mind seeing a man unhappy, but I hate seeing a neglected field. I mean to manage the best way possible, and to get the very best results I will do my utmost. I was never made to take a back seat. I will work as the Strandigers have always worked. But I will be master, too! Put yourself in my place! There is the owner going about like a dog with its teeth drawn; there is my sister, who talks about Berlin in the morning and dying at night. There are the people at Eschenwinkel, who are half of them rude, and the other half mad; and there are you, Maria Landt, looking at me as if you wanted to make me utterly wretched and miserable: not to speak of your sister, who clenches her fist whenever she sees me. And all that because a man has come into this house who knows what he wants."

Maria Landt leaned against the door. "Tell me what you want!"

He took the ruler from his writing-table and swished it so that it sounded through the whole room.

"If you can decide to take my part then everything is straightforward; Andrees will make up his mind; the people of Eschenwinkel will stay in their houses till Andrees or I can build new ones. You and your sister can stay here and be as kind to the people of Eschenwinkel and their children as you want to be. Well?" Again a swish through the air. It was unheard, for Maria was crying quietly.

He sat on the edge of the writing-table; he bent his closely cropped head and looked at her. His head was clever and well made; it looked like the head of a fine hound, listening to something stirring in the undergrowth.

"I cannot understand it clearly," she said. "I don't know whether it is right or wrong."

He swung his head to and fro, looking at her all the time. "You can drive away every cloud from the Strandigerhof. It will help every one. I will be quite straightforward and honest; you can help me, too. I must have a fair amount of

money in my hands or I can't take hold of the place as I want to. You have more than I need. You may spend the rest as you want. And, moreover, when you, Maria Landt, are the tenant's wife, and you say that you want to remain here always and, as the years pass, you are still troubled that there should be a difference between Andrees and myself, then the lease won't last for twelve years only. Yes, I will go so far as to say that the time may come when we shall own all this fine estate, the best for ten miles round."

She had pressed her handkerchief to her mouth and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Say yes, Maria Landt! Do you see, from my childhood I have known two things. They were burnt into me by the conditions in which I spent my youth. First, I want to be master, to be king. Secondly, I need money for that, a good deal of money. My whole mind has been fixed on money. I hide nothing from you."

"I am glad," she said, weeping, yet keeping control of herself, "that it is only money which brings us together."

He raised his head quickly and looked at her. "That is not quite right. I have sharp eyes, Maria Landt, and I want to be master in everything. I must tell you that too."

She raised both hands as if she were trying feebly to keep him off.

"Very well," she said, in a toneless voice.

There was something trustful and childlike in her eyes and bearing, something deeply moving.

"You think it will be all right now?"

A momentary gleam of tenderness passed over his proud, keen face.

"To-morrow we will make our secret known, Maria, then everything will be plain."

"To-morrow is Sunday," she said. "We must go to church together as people do."

He wanted to go up to her because he was sorry that she looked so broken and had such desolate eyes. But she nodded dreamily several times, and went quickly past him.

"Tell no one to-day," he said; "so that nobody can interfere."

She went away. She felt very calm and quiet. She would always feel like that now, quiet and dead. She would never

be able to raise her head; those people who carry a heavy burden on their shoulders always look before them on the ground. She went slowly up the stairs, drawing a deep breath at every step, and she felt very weary. On the last step she was again seized by a faintness, but she controlled herself, went into her room, and laid down on her bed; she fell asleep at once, and slept dreamlessly and quietly, as she had not slept for a long time. After an hour or so, when the room was quite dark, she was awakened by Anna, who stood close to the chest of drawers with a candle in her hand, and asked her some question about housekeeping. She got up without answering, and walked restlessly to and fro, a thing she was not accustomed to do. Then she said —

“ You can go to Eschenwinkel this evening.”

Anna, who was doing something to the stove, got up; and it struck Maria that she looked very pale. Maria Landt always thought of other people first, so she asked —

“ Have you got a cold?”

“ Yes.”

“ Then you must stay at home; but you ought not to wear that big shawl in the house, or you certainly will take cold.”

Anna Witt drew the shawl closer round her. “ I am freezing,” she said, and looked up and down in a scared way.

“ If you go to Eschenwinkel tell your father that the notice is taken back. All the Eschenwinklers can stay in their houses, and they will have work. Now leave me alone.”

When she was alone she began once more to walk to and fro. She had thought that she would be calm and tranquil; she had hoped that she might have some feeling of success and happiness. But she was surrounded by new circumstances: they demanded many things from her, and put questions which needed answering, and she felt so restless that she shook all over.

The third house on the right was the smallest in Eschenwinkel. When you went in through the only door you found yourself in the kitchen, opposite the hearth. On the right was one room, on the left another. In the room on the left lived Pellwormer, the night-watchman; in that on the right, the widow Thiel. It had not been possible to make a staircase inside the house, so a ladder had been placed outside, over the

front door; it led through a skylight in the room to the loft, which was full of the light, clean turf burnt in the neighbourhood.

Both rooms were full of men, and on each of the tables stood a brandy bottle. The pale, timid February sun seemed to stand outside the window with expressionless eyes, unable in its blindness to penetrate the mist. It blinked towards the bottle on the table, which reflected a sickly yellow light. That morning they had all been excited like a nest of ants suddenly stirred up, and now they had run together. They talked of emigrating. Centuries ago, in the grey dawn of history, the inhabitants of the land had met together when the snow was melting in March and talked of emigrating.

A man had come from the north over the wide, dark heath, to know if they would go with him southwards. On the heath by the Wodanshill they had discussed whether they should go or stay, whether they should settle or roam away, whether it was to be the cottage or the cart. There was a surging excitement then in the nation, as there is in the herd when it is driven out of the stables in spring. The ground they had was too narrow for the young colts; there were too many children; their limbs were too strong, their courage was too high, and their eyes too bright. They had captured a man on the shore, whose boat had been thrown on the sand by the west wind and broken. The shipwrecked man was pallid and wet as he climbed up the dunes; he looked apprehensively at the inhospitable land, covered with the cold mist of autumn. It was with a trembling heart that he went in the hut. But he came at a good hour. The mead kettle stood on the fire; the sides of smoked bacon hung round the low room, and beneath them were men who were smoky too. They received him kindly, and entertained him hospitably. He drew glowing pictures of the strange country. He was a trader from the Rhine; and his hands, as he darted them out, were as enticing as the boiling, sparkling mead. His words went far beyond the truth. He it is who is to blame for the wandering of the Teutons! He has it on his conscience that he did not refuse the mead when it was time he should. But he was overjoyed by the hospitality and cheerfulness.

"The sweetest mead hangs on the trees in great clusters like flowers," he said. "Here mother earth is like a she bear," he

went on. "She sleeps the whole winter in her white fur, but there she is like a beautiful young woman, a delight to the eyes the whole year round."

He went on talking in this way and crazed their minds with his words. He succeeded in gaining good treatment for himself and comfortable quarters for the entire winter. Nothing worse happened to him than that once, when the master of the house was out hunting, the mistress struck him somewhat harshly on the face with a big cooking-spoon made of linden wood.

So they held a council on the Wodanshill at the beginning of March. A week later they shed the blood of the last sacrificial horse, striking it deep in the neck; the last fire smoked for the sacrifice, and they looked for the last time over the sea and the heath. Then they plunged into the forest path. There was heard the last creaking of the last cart. They went happily southwards, and their bones lie in France by the Rhone.

In the same year, when the May wind was laying its soft cheek against the heath, the face of the first Hun looked through the bright beech twigs—a face which had slanting eyes in what seemed a deep valley between the high cheekbones. His legs were unlovely, short and crooked, and bent outwards from much riding. He saw that the heath was deserted, that there was not even the smoke from a single hut or the footprint of a single Germanic man. He, Probislav the Springer, saw first of all his race the mighty sea beyond the heath—the North Sea which his people had longed for so greatly and travelled so far to find—and he sprang up the Wodanshill like a cat. He turned round and broke out into such a howl that the Germanic heath shuddered with horror in every single blade, and the elves, who had gone to sleep among the gravestones on the Wodanshill, waked up in terror, the Hun howled so fearfully. The elves had remained in the country like cats in a deserted house, but from that hour they would rest no more. They grew wicked, and plagued the newcomers to a really frightful degree. When lovers met in twilight on the edge of the wood they parted them by croaking like the ill-omened frog. They turned away the arrow from the deer, and when the hunter rushed after it they disguised themselves like gnarled oak twigs and got between his crooked legs. On dark, stormy nights they would tear out the

pegs from the roofs, the whole roof would go whirling away across the heath, and its inmates would lie miserably in the wind and snow. They plagued grown-up people with tooth-ache and sciatica; and at night they broke the round earthen-ware vessels which stood near the hut and were the pride of the Hunnish housewife. They hated the whole race of the Huns. They could not bear people who looked more like dwarfed trees than human beings, and who sang the most hideous love-songs and drinking-songs by moonlight.

They hoped, too, for a new Germanic period, which soon arrived. For, just like the weeds on the Geest, the Saxons spread over the Elbe and peopled the land once more. They were true Germans, broad in every way; they were broad in their walk, they had broad axes, they were broad in their speech, and broad in their skulls. Then the elves grew friendly again. When the old mother went toiling through the wood they put a stick in her way, handy for a crutch; they played with the children who ran along the edge of the wood; they would appear suddenly in the dark corner of the hut, so that the girls would scream out and fall suddenly into the arms of the very people whom they secretly preferred. Now, as we hear, there are men who are so clever that they know everything in heaven and earth, and so don't need to keep their eyes open. They lie yawning on the heath, gaping in the air or in the wood among the moss, and say it is tedious. And all the time the elves are playing leap-frog over their very noses.

Under Pellwormer's low thatched roof they too were talking of going away. But they had little joy or hope; there was no light in their eyes as in the eyes of their forefathers. They *had* to go, or else they would have stayed where they were. There were three things possible. They could go near the city, live in cottages on the edge of the Geest, and hire themselves out as day-labourers, looking for work on the farms of the March, some hours' distance away. That they would not do. They could go to Hamburg and work in the town or at the docks — some of them had been there the previous winter during a strike. They had come home with plenty of money, but also with the knowledge that the town is too narrow for people who are accustomed to the wide prospects of the heath and the March and the sea. Or, finally, they

could emigrate to America. It was of that they were talking now.

The widow Thiel had put on her spectacles, which were fastened with a ribbon round her white nightcap, and she read two or three letters in a scolding voice. She only used this voice when she read aloud; at other times she spoke in a high, almost weeping tone. They all listened. They were very attentive, very calm and tranquil, but that was all. There was no tone either of excitement or approval. They struggled with the old self-distrust. This was what Dora wrote, who had been ten years in Iowa —

“ Dear Mother, — I take up my pen to write a letter to you, hoping that it finds you well. Dear mother, what makes me write to you is this. The children ate so much at dinner-time to-day; it made me think how we used to be eight at table, and how we used to sit around and beat on the table with our spoons. You could not bear that, but we were so hungry. Heinrich used to stand at the window and say, ‘ Father is coming.’ And you said many a time that we should all take three dumplings, or else father would not be able to get his spade in the ground, for it was spring-time, March, and the earth was still frozen. Dear mother, we can have pork here every day, the pickle barrel stands in the kitchen, and whenever I want, my Klaus goes out and shoots a hen, for they shoot the fowls here. Dear mother, when I think of all the trouble you had with father, who was not strong, and with us, and that your only son is dead — ”

“ Disappeared,” said Antje.

“ Then I cry many a time, for I have children myself now; there are two who bring the horses in and one at the breast, and I know now how you must have loved us. So I write again in this letter to tell you that people ought not to be afraid of the water. It only takes ten or twelve days. Come over here; it will be ‘ ollreit.’ ”

The old woman struck her hand heavily on the table, and said, half-weeping and half-scolding —

“ I have my pension, and I earn a good deal by mending sacks. I cannot go away like that.”

Peter Schütt had already drunk a third glass of schnapps.

He belonged to those Schütt's who have been drunkards for three generations. His grandfather, old Hans Schütt, lost the farm near the church which the family used to own, but he did not drink in the last year of his life. People say that one day he found his grandson, this very Peter Schütt, who was then a boy of ten, in the cowshed drinking from the brandy bottle; he was overcome with horror, and abstained till his death. The Schütt's have no self-respect; that gets drowned in spirit as flies do. They are the only people in the whole of Eschenwinkel who send their children begging in winter. The others are all honest, self-respecting men, but Peter Schütt is worthless and coarse. Pellwormer, who disliked drunken people, sat opposite to him, and watched him uneasily. He wanted to tell him to stop drinking, but he was too tongue-tied to bring out a word.

Schütt struck on the table, and began to sing, "Must I go away — away from the town?"

Pellwormer banged the table; his eyebrows seemed to vanish in his hair, and he sang in the same tune, "Wherever you go, wherever you go, you will drink all you have, you will drink all you have." He spoke without stammering, and took hold of the brandy bottle.

"You are right," said the widow Thiel, and nodded to her housemate. She took off her spectacles very carefully, using both hands; her cap was displaced, and she pushed it back. "I must say I am very happy here; but I must say, too, that I should like to see my grandchildren — there are fourteen of them altogether."

"But we," said Dwenger; "we have a house full of children."

"Is everything true that the letter says?" cried Schütt.

"Yes," said the old woman. "If Therese had written that one would have to take it with a grain of salt. But what Dora writes is true. They have killed three pigs this year."

There was silence for a moment. They were all in imagination standing before fine fat pigs hanging on the ladder, and sitting before heavily laden tables.

Dwenger's wife said softly, "Three hundred pounds." She could see the pigs so very plainly. "And then the land! A hundred and forty acres!"

"How much is that?"

"Twenty or thirty morgen."

Again there was a pause.

"But they must work."

"Like horses."

"We have to do that, too."

"But they get on."

"There is the difference. Here our work only gives us half enough, there they have everything they want."

"Well, you have always had enough—with your three children."

"Yes, but where there are many children there's trouble all the winter."

"Man, just think of it! Thirty morgen of land."

"If we had only two morgen!"

"Land!"

They looked at each other.

"Yes, that is the worst, that we have no land at all. It was because of that that all the others went away, and it is because of that we shall go, too."

"Everywhere we go and try to settle people can drive us away. If we go on to the heath, that belongs to Heim Heiderieter. If we go into the wood, that belongs to the peasants. If we go to the dyke, that belongs to Strandiger. Even if we sit at home it costs money."

"Yes! it's true."

"I will write to my uncle who has a farm near Clinton. The town is called Clinton, it is in Iowa."

"Yes! And we will write to Dora and Therese Thiel as well."

"And I will write to my brothers—they will send money at once."

"And your children, Rohde!"

Rohde, who had said very little, nodded his head gravely. His hair was already quite grey. He had had dysentery at Metz. He always felt at his best in Eschenwinkel. His children were all in America except the youngest, who sat beside him now. He was a hired man in the village, and, like all the Rohdes, serious and capable.

"Dora must send two free tickets in any case," said the widow Thiel. "If I write to her she will do it."

"If—if—I write to her," said Pellwormer. It was he

who always wrote the letters, for the widow Thiel had never learnt to write.

Young Rohde bent towards his father, who remained silent.

"I should like to go with them, but you and mother —"

"If you want to," said the old man, "then go! The others have gone. You might as well."

"But I am the last. If you could go with me —"

"I have lived here fifty years, and I went with them to France. I can't go away as if all that were nothing. And your mother can't leave the two in the churchyard."

Schütt interrupted. "Man, you are afraid of homesickness! Home? A cat's place. What do I care for home? God strike me!"

"He will — he will," chanted Pellwormer. "You see if he doesn't. Remember Pellwormer."

The front door opened and they all looked to see who it was. Anna Witt stood there, and she was very pale. She hid herself behind the widow Thiel's broad back and said —

"Maria Landt told me to say that the notice is taken back. We are all to stay here, and there will be work too."

"Good heavens!"

"Just listen!"

"But what has happened all at once?" Schütt roared out. "The cat is playing with the mice. I mean to emigrate. The whole of the dear home, as you call it, is nothing to me."

"Who told you?"

"Maria Landt."

"What has *she* to do with it?"

"Do you think she has pleaded for us?"

"Perhaps she is going to marry Franz Strandiger."

Anna Witt drew herself up. "No!" she said.

"But I tell you it is too late."

"Strandiger won't do it, the hard wretch."

"No! No! Never! He will drive us away one by one."

"We should be in danger all our lives."

Young Rohde bent again to his father. "What do you think, father?"

"You ought to know. Don't trouble about us. We won't stand in your way. You know how badly we have done all these years."

"Then I will write to-morrow to Iowa, father."

"Certainly! We will write," several said. "It is not because of the notice but because of that man. He is and he always will be a persecutor."

"We will write. Of course we will write."

They separated to write their clumsy letters by dull lamp-light, on tables dark and stained with use. The word most often repeated in the letters was "Land!"

Pellwormer remained behind in his room, shaking his head; he had closed the door and opened his hymn-book and was singing softly. He could not speak clearly and he was all the more ready to sing.

Anna stayed in the widow Thiel's room. She sat opposite the stout old woman and looked at her as if she were beseeching —

"Tell me the truth."

The widow had put her spectacles on again and stared at the girl's pale face.

"You are ill?" she said.

"No!" said Anna, and looked down at the table.

"You look just as Therese did when she went to America."

Anna Witt knew the story. In the last year she had learnt all these stories.

"Yes!" she said.

"When are you going to be married?"

She shook her head and looked up, all her misery revealed in that one glance.

The door opened and Hinnerk Elsen stepped into the room, bending his back.

"I have been looking for you at your father's," he said. "Come with me now, it is just nine." He held his watch in his hand.

"You ought to marry soon," said the old woman.

Hinnerk Elsen looked at her from his superior height. He had never liked the widow Thiel; she talked too much and didn't mind what she said.

"We must save first," he answered. "I shall not marry till I have two thousand marks, and Anna is still too young."

The old woman leaned back in her great armchair and looked at him quite dumbfounded.

"What?" She had her hand raised, still holding her spectacles.

They were both on the threshold.

"Are you going to America, too?" she called out.

"No!" said Hinnerk Elsen, and stiffened his neck. "People who save and wait to marry can get on here!"

The old woman struck on the table utterly at a loss.  
"Well! then don't!"

## CHAPTER X.

Snow fell heavily the next morning. A keen east wind drove it across the heath and over the March into the sea. But when the tiny flakes whirled, before the wind could find any place to rest, if it were only a tuft of heather, or a mole-hill, or a dry stalk of grass, they flung themselves down hastily and took shelter, glad to escape from the terrible pursuit. Most of them were carried off by the wind and torn in fragments and filled the air so closely and finely that people could hardly find the way to church. Behind larger objects, houses and walls and the slope of the heath, they formed long drifts with sharp ridges, white walls built themselves right across the path to the church, giving amusement enough for the children, but difficult for the old people to cross.

However, there were many people going to church.

The little servant maid from the Strandigerhof had got up early that morning and gone round through the village, covered with snow till she looked like a snow maiden, asking people to clear the path to church: she had told them "an engaged couple are going;" she put on a very wise air, and then vanished like a bigger snowflake in the mad whirl.

Many people came from Eschenwinkel up the Sandway. As they passed, five letters were put in the pillar-box by the school; five letters, each with a clumsily written address and almost the same contents. When they arrived in the church, they stood in the entrance and talked things over — their letters and the withdrawal of the notice — and they looked towards the "glass box," as they were accustomed to call the Strandigers' pew.

Heim Heiderieter arrived, completely covered with snow and his hands buried in his coat. A whirlwind of snow followed him through the door. His housekeeper had said to him that morning: "Of course the master is going to

church?" He had at once said "Yes." He had intended to begin his work that Sunday morning, but when she said in that tone: "Of course the master will go to church?" What could he do?

However, he was in good spirits. He was nearly always in good spirits now. He felt that he was getting on. His house was full of activity, his rooms were cheerful, and the cattle were thriving in the shed. And besides — and this was the most important of all — he had experienced new emotions, first a feeling of shame, then the quiet but resolute decision to be serious and industrious, then the joy in work and finally self-respect. No one could say what might happen now.

He stamped the snow from his boots and stepped up to the Eschenwinklers in his cheerful way.

"What is the matter?"

They told him what they knew and what they conjectured.

"We think that Maria Landt is engaged to Franz Strandiger."

Heim grew very quiet. They took their places, the women in the midst, the men on the south side; the north side was almost empty. The bell was rung. As it ceased, they heard the sound of the vestry door. The organ began. Pastor Frisius, stiff and bent, crossed the choir to his seat, opening his hymn-book and beginning to sing as he went, but without looking up.

It was all as usual.

Again there was the sound of the opening door. It was the southern door of the choir.

Andrees Strandiger walked slowly across the choir to the Strandiger pew. His eyes were fixed on the ground and he seemed to be thinking deeply. His face was so wretched that, in the pale light of the winter morning, he seemed ill.

Frasius had suddenly come to a standstill. He looked up and shook his gray head gently. The people in the pews glanced at each other and then gazed round. Some women pressed closer together, as if they were afraid of being alone.

Heim Heiderieter's tender heart swelled with pity; his brow grew hot, and he thought: "I will go to him to-morrow. I have been a whole fortnight in my room worrying about nothing. How wretched he looks."

Again the choir door opened.

"Maria Landt! — There! Franz Strandiger." They came together and went slowly forward. In the midst of the choir Franz Strandiger put her arm in his, and they walked in that way to the Strandiger pew.

Heim Heiderieter bent forward and gazed sadly at Andrees. The organ played, but the singing was over. They all looked at Andrees. He had risen and was standing in the open door. He looked at the two as a young man might look at death advancing towards him. Then, as if he were overcome with a sudden sharp pain, he turned away, passed through the people who sat as silent as stone images and went out of the church with stumbling, uncertain steps. Behind him the children's clear voices began again —

"These are but little things to God,  
For to the Highest all is one,  
To make the wealthy weak and poor — "

The wind blew away the rest.

All was silent in the church. They were full of astonishment, thinking deeply, or making plans, but there was no real devotion. Maria Landt was the only one who tried to follow. Frisius preached in his usual way, homely and somewhat stiff but sincere, he spoke of Christ and how he had died to fulfil his task. It was Estomihhi, the last Sunday before Lent.

They went out thronging together. Those who had to go far fastened their cloaks firmly, drew their collars up and pressed their caps down on their foreheads. The Eschenwinklers stood in a group outside. When Maria Landt came to the door she could see nothing at first, for there was a real whirlwind of snow. Then suddenly she saw all the grave faces round. She was so frightened that her heart stood still and her mind was confused. She stepped up to the widow Thiel who was standing by Schütt.

"Haven't you got what you wanted?"

The widow Thiel said: "They are going to America all the same."

"Five letters have gone," said Schütt, and he glared askance at Franz Strandiger, who had turned away coldly and was looking round the white churchyard.

"But why? Tell me! Why?"

The wind howled once more and blinded them with a cloud of snow. Maria Landt tried to see their faces, but they looked at the whirling snow at their feet, at the white church door, and the people who passed. Dwenger's wife bent over her child and put on his warm mits. No one looked in Maria's eyes, and they seemed to grow darker and quieter and sadder every moment. Then she took the arm of her betrothed, and they went away quietly. As the widow Thiel looked after her, she said —

"See! She seems to have grown smaller!" She put on the woollen mittens which Maria had given her a week ago. She was a hard woman. Her life had been very hard and she had lost the power of sympathy. She really liked to see trouble. She thought: "I had to bear it, too." It was in that very spirit that she had talked to Anna Witt the evening before, and that she talked to Maria Landt now: harsh and cold. She went often to church, but Pastor Frisius might preach as long as he liked about kindness and compassion. It all passed over her like water on a stone. "Pastor Frisius doesn't understand that. What has Pastor Frisius had to suffer!"

Talking of indifferent matters, they all went back to Eschenwinkel. When they separated to go to their houses, Schütt, who was already at his door, called across to Dwenger —

"Will you come to me afterwards? I have a bottle of schnapps in the house. We will begin to keep the feast to-night. It is all the same now."

In the meanwhile, Andrees Strandiger had burst into the parlour.

"Did you know," he shrieked at the old Hobooken, "that Maria Landt was going to marry your fine son? Answer!"

Lena rose from her seat in horror; the book fell from her hand face downward on the carpet. The old woman remained rigid and unbending.

"Yes, what have you against it?"

"You'll find that out! Maria Franz's wife? It's madness!"

As he spoke the door opened, Anna Witt looked at them, first at one and then at the other, drew back and closed the

door behind her. Outside in the passage she put her clenched hands to her temples, and said softly: "She is to be his wife — she!"

In the room, Andrees had grown calmer. He leaned against the wall, and talked as if to himself. "It's evident she has done it for the sake of Eschenwinkel; they have forced the poor sweet child that way. You — you have blinded me for years, but I see a gleam of light now. I will get rid of you — Lena Strandiger. I am free of you! And I will see —" He raised his hands. "I will see if I can't make us all free."

He went out.

Lena Strandiger picked up her book, thrust it under her arm, and went to the door. "Franz has done well for himself, but badly for me." She stood still, breathed freely, and stretched out her arms like some one shaking off a load of weariness. "Well! — It's done with; the end of Act Strandigerhof! I will go to Berlin to-night."

The old Hobooken was left alone in the room. She walked to and fro with her hands behind her back, in masculine fashion, straight and stiff as an arrow, and the hard lines round her mouth grew still harder.

After Franz left her in the hall Maria went up-stairs. Her restless mind seemed to be roaming round, looking for something. She went into the parlour. Ingeborg sat by the window, and looked over to the pond through the wild snow-storm. Her cheeks were hot, and her eyes full of fire; she had imagined herself out on the heath, and her heart was glowing and beating. Andrees was free from one of them — free from Maria — for whom — for whom?

"Will you help me?" Maria asked; she stood at the door trying to unfasten her jacket with her frozen hands.

Ingeborg sprang up and crossed the room in her graceful, stately way, bending her lovely slender figure as the birch-trees on the Wodanshill bend their stems in the wind. When she saw her sister's weary, sad face, she said gently —

"I don't know why you have done it; you don't look like some one just engaged." She bent down and fumbled at the lowest buttons on the jacket; tears came into her eyes. "But what you do is always right — always!"

Maria clasped her warmly. "You are my dear sister!" So, for awhile, they held each other in a close embrace.

Then Ingeborg began to weep bitterly.

In the evening Maria sat by the window, looking out into the twilight and dreaming. The last gleam of light seemed to have burnt out in her sad eyes. Her heart was weary and wanted rest, but it could always be startled awake by a harsh word. "They are going to America all the same!" When she thought of that, there was a glimmer under the ashes. But it was not the true fire of life; it was a fierce, uncanny gleam.

At the end of the passage Ingeborg crouched down on the stairs, hidden by the banisters. Her fair head was bent forward, her hands were in her lap, and she listened with sparkling eyes. The whole of her pale face was full of life.

Down-stairs they were packing up and carrying things. One box after the other was sent to the back door. Lena Strandiger could be heard crying, then her brother, quiet and determined, laughing momentarily. It was the masterful Strandiger laugh. Once Anna crept up the stairs. She was a pretty, graceful girl. She started back with a scream when she saw the figure crouching in the shadow.

"Is she going away?" Ingeborg asked, but Anna did not hear. Ingeborg could bear it no longer, and ran down the stairs. She crossed the dark passage unobserved, but as she was hastening through the back door Franz Strandiger stood suddenly before her. She pressed herself sideways close to the wall, and let him pass her in silence, but her eyes were fixed keenly on him. He bowed to her slightly, but did not speak. There was a strange repugnance in her eyes, and still more in the stiff manner she had suddenly assumed. She ran to the stables as if she were pursued; Hinnerk Elsen stood there with his watch in his hand.

"Are you putting the horses in?"

"Not yet!" He turned round to look at his watch by the light of the lantern.

"Ah, that stupid watch! I want to know if you are going to town."

"Yes — at twenty minutes past eight."

"Who is going?"

"Fräulein Strandiger."

She was off like the wind. Hinnerk only saw her tall shadow on the wall. He stood and wondered how any one could be so graceful and so curious, and set such small value on time.

While he was still standing Anna crept out, breathed so deeply that he could hear her, and tried to say something, but he interrupted her.

"You have got cold; go into the kitchen, and don't go out this evening! Do you hear?"

He did not speak unkindly; he was rather sorry for her, she had been so timid lately. He would have liked to take her in his arms, but the two thousand marks were not complete. And he was in service. Everything in due time.

Half an hour later Ingeborg went into Maria's room; as she found no one there she opened quietly the door of Frau Strandiger's bedroom. Maria was bending over the old lady's bed, but she turned round.

"Lena Strandiger has gone," said Ingeborg softly.

Maria looked at her, but the news seemed to make no impression.

"They are going to America. It is all no good." She put her finger to her lips and said in her natural tone: "Be careful. Aunt is ill. She has a little fever. We must send for the doctor to-morrow."

When they were both in the living-room Maria passed her hand several times across her brow.

"Aunt Strandiger knows nothing at all about the lease. And now there is my betrothal. Do you know, Ingeborg, what Andrees means to do? You ought to know."

"I know nothing. It will be a heavy blow for aunt. He is to blame for everything."

Maria turned from the window and looked long and questioningly in her sister's eyes.

Ingeborg's face became suffused with a dusky red and her eyes fell.

"Ingeborg," said Maria gently, "you must always, always stand by Andrees, and not pretend that you don't care for him. Great trouble has come through that already. He takes everything to heart and broods over it and can't be at peace with himself. Be true to him, Ingeborg. Tell him—I am your

comrade. Then he will know what you are. Don't desert him, Ingeborg."

Ingeborg turned round and went out.

The next afternoon, Monday, the doctor came. There was nothing much the matter with the old lady, but he thought there must have been a draught from the window where she sat, and that she had taken a slight cold. He talked at some length, prescribed something, and went out. The blind old lady sat up in bed. She was pleased with the kind attention they gave her and excited by the doctor's visit, for she thought a good deal of him; she went on talking.

"Tell me, child, when are Franz Strandiger and his people going away; they have made a long visit."

Maria was silent.

"I can't bear the Hoboken. It's strange that Peter Strandiger's two children both take after her. The Hobokens are hard-hearted. I have always been afraid that Ingeborg might care for Franz; they used to be a good deal alike when they were children, and they are still. They were always so high-spirited, and made fun of you and Andrees. You remember, don't you? Then I asked her a little while ago: 'Ingeborg, how do you get on with Franz? Do you still play hide-and-seek with each other as you used to behind the elms?' But she said: 'Aunt! I won't look at him. He has something so fierce about him. I don't care for him.' That was what she said, but I am sorry I could not see if she blushed. Tell me, child, aren't you thinking of marrying; you and Andrees?"

Then Maria got up and felt for the New Testament with her trembling hands.

"I have not read aloud to you," she said. She began to read from the Gospel. In the midst of her reading she was overcome by a feeling of bewilderment and desolation and turned pale. She could scarcely keep in her place, she was so tortured by her frightful sadness and the beating of her heart. Like some one in a burning house, and unable to find the door, she screamed out suddenly and fell down by the bed.

## CHAPTER XI.

ON Tuesday evening the weather changed. A moist, vigorous west wind had been driving the clouds before it the whole day long; it descended to the ground, and in the course of twelve hours changed the whole aspect of the landscape. It came the way Anna Witt used to come into a room the previous summer, when she had still been a bright, strong girl, with her pail and broom and duster. In a few hours everything was scoured and cleaned. On Wednesday morning there was only a streak of snow remaining here and there in the trenches. The Wehl was quite clear and full of little rippling waves. During the night the whole countryside had been washed clean, and it turned a bright face to the morning.

On Tuesday evening there had been a scene in Franz Strandiger's room. Andrees appeared and vented his scorn and his anger in furious words. They heard him shout, "You are a liar, a scoundrel," in tones that could be heard right through the passage to the front door. They could not hear the reply.

Franz did not say much.

"I am not a dreamer like you and Heiderieter. You go creeping on, but I advance boldly. I wanted to be master so I rented this estate. I wanted to remain master so I got engaged to Maria. You let it of your own free will, and it was of her own free will that she said 'Yes.' "

And all the waves, roused by the tempest in the study, seemed to storm and rage against the heart of the poor girl, who was all too frail for such an onslaught.

Anna Witt came first. She stood in the open door and stared at Maria, not knowing what to say.

"I loved him," she said, weeping, "Franz Strandiger."

"Anna! You! Be quiet, Anna. We must not think of it — nor you either — it makes my head so confused. I feel

as if the water came over me. I want to help—but it is—much too difficult. Go and sleep and forget it all, and don't mention it. Do go! Lie on your right side and don't dream of such fearful things."

Anna ran out of the room.

Maria stayed that night in the sick-room and also the whole of the following day, Ash Wednesday. She wanted no one with her, and she told Ingeborg the sick woman needed perfect quiet.

When in after years Ingeborg looked back on those sad days she could not remember that Maria had shown any trace of a disordered mind until that evening, when it became very evident. Ingeborg, so far as is known, only spoke of it to Frisius and Eva. Years after old Frau Strandiger would sit up in bed, her hands folded, her blind open eyes fixed straight before her, and say in her quiet, gentle way how Maria had been so helpful even then, full of sympathy and affection. She had scarcely spoken, but she had read aloud morning and evening with a monotonous expressionless voice. "As if she could no longer understand God's word," the blind woman said.

That evening in the twilight Andrees entered the room. They could not keep him away. His mother had fallen asleep, and he drew Maria from the bed and led her into the living-room. They neither of them saw that Ingeborg sat crouched in the shadow by the window.

She was torn violently from her happy dreams.

"I will not," he said, in a fierce stifled voice, "I will not let you be his wife. I will not. He must give you back your word."

"Let me go!—I have given it to him and he has paid for it."

"It would be hell. You with him! How could you be so mad?"

"How could I? I will ask him to build new houses for the Eschenwinklers, then the sun will shine in the windows and the windows in the Wehl; it will be so bright. I will read him the parable of the Good Samaritan."

"As if that would be any use. Oh, think, Maria! Do you remember how we stood at the window up-stairs when we were children? And we looked across to Eschenwinkel

and Flackelholm? And I pointed it all out to you and held your hand fast?"

"That was a lovely time!"

"Come with me! We will go away somewhere. Wherever you wish."

"I cannot. I must wait till the new houses are built. I must sit on the bridge in the Wehl and be happy."

She passed her hand over her hair as if trying to remember something.

"But you can go away. You can go to Flackelholm. It lies there away from the world—away from the world in the great sea. Away from the world! That is the thing to do. Whoever will do that will find it the best possible. You must go to Flackelholm and bathe. Antje says there is a fresh wind."

"Come, Maria! Dear Maria!"

She raised her arms and touched his hair and said pitifully: "Dear Andrees, not with me. Ingeborg shall go with you. I must look after Eschenwinkel—they are going to emigrate, away from the beautiful houses. They must not do that. I must see them. Let me go; I want to talk to them."

Her voice grew lower and lower. She spoke as if they had been two timid children in the darkness.

"I will take care of everything that belongs to you till you come back. You will have white hair then and love Eschenwinkel, and we shall laugh."

She stroked his cheeks with her hands.

"Do you know what they call that song the girls sing when they go walking by the Wehl.

"When our hair was golden still  
We swore eternal faith;  
Our love should never be less fair,  
The fiend should never enter there,  
Not enter there.

"When forty years had passed away,  
They saw each other by the board;  
Their eyes were calm and white their hair,  
They said "It was God entered there,"  
God entered there."

She wept aloud. "It is not for me! 'Our Father who art — ,'"

His great grief broke out. "What are you talking about? I don't understand you."

"Be quiet!" she said, "your mother is sleeping; she must know nothing about it. She has no eyes to cry with, but I can cry. But I can cry. I can cry so softly that no one hears."

He grasped her arms. "I will come this evening. Not a word. I will come at seven. Just after seven. Do you hear?"

He hastened out, rushed to the stable and ordered the carriage, went restlessly round the house, walked some distance over the heath and returned; he stood holding his watch in the courtyard, his hand moving impatiently to and fro, shuddering with cold from head to foot. Ingeborg crept out of the room, lay down on her bed and sobbed quietly. Then, when the clock struck seven, she sat on the window-seat brooding, her knees drawn up and her hands crossed over them; she stared out into the night, which seemed waiting under the elms with its wide, sad eyes. Light drops rustled down from the trees. Over the Wehl there was a faint light. Some stars were there and looked across to the Strandigerhof and to Ingeborg.

Ingeborg looked out into the garden and listened to the falling drops. They fell without cessation, like tears of despair.

When the clock on the staircase began to strike seven, Maria came into the room. She went up to Ingeborg with strange steps, quick, and yet faltering and said (Ingeborg noticed what a constraint she seemed to be putting on herself; she spoke as if with the greatest difficulty), "I will go to bed; I am very tired. Will you go to aunt?"

Ingeborg slipped down from the window-seat, her whole body trembling.

"Tell Andrees that I am ill and have gone to bed. He wanted me to do something — I can't remember what. He wanted something. It was impossible. He doesn't like Eschenwinkel. Tell them all, Anna Witt and the woman for whom I made the brown mitts, that I am going to sleep, I am tired."

"But if Andrees comes here?"

"Lock the door, Ingeborg! Lock the door! Was he talking about Flackelholm? The air is pure there, and you must go with him. Lock the door, Ingeborg."

Ingeborg went to the parlour and stood by the round table near the sofa; her lips were firmly compressed and her eyes wide and fixed straight before her. There were deep, disagreeable wrinkles on her brow that might have been made by a rough, stern hand. There was no light in the room. She leaned her hand on the table, her knees trembled so. As it touched the flat surface her fingers came in contact with a match which lay there. It touched her finger as if caressing it. At first she moved it unthinkingly to and fro, then she smelt a faint, sulphurous odour. She laid the match as if she were playing with it between her two fingers and broke it with her thumb. It broke off short and almost noiselessly. She felt the two halves, and when she found they were unequal in length, she threw them as if carelessly on the table, then she recollected herself, closed her eyes, sought with her hand and found a piece; she took it up, and running to the window, saw that it was the longer half. Her face was distorted, and her eyes seemed to see something dreadful, they were so full of terror. She left the room, and, as she went through the passage, she locked the door of the bedroom. She put the key in her pocket. But Maria Landt was not in the room; she was already on the bridge in the Wehl.

Ingeborg went on along the passage and came to the stairs. Looking down she saw Pastor Frisius standing at the front door. He came up the stairs, bent as usual. He was going to visit Frau Strandiger because she was ill. Ingeborg fled back into the shadow of the passage and remained there with a beating heart till his figure had vanished into the sickroom, then she returned towards the staircase. She crouched down as she had done the day before in the shadow of the banisters. From the sickroom low tones sounded now and again, and from below there came the sound of distant steps. Everything else was still. She looked through the banisters with resolute eyes, holding her breath. A door was opened below. Once again there was stillness.

The house was like a coffin. Pastor Frisius was speaking out there above the coffin.

"What foolish thoughts! How long will he stay?"

Not long. It is Ash Wednesday to-day. The evening service is at half-past seven. He will soon go and then Andrees will come. Andrees!

The door opens again. That is his step. He is coming. He comes quickly up the stairs.

She rises out of the darkness so suddenly, and appearing so tall, that he seizes the banisters in sudden terror. His teeth chatter with cold and excitement.

"What do *you* want?" he asked, with flaming eyes.

She laughed lightly. "Maria told me to say that she was ill. She has locked herself in, and is in bed asleep."

"Go to her, and tell her I am here."

She shook her head and looked him boldly in the eyes. "She won't open the door; she won't let me in."

He half-turned away, his face white with distress.

At that moment the bedroom door opened and they heard Frisius approaching through the dark passage. Andrees stepped back into the shadow of the stairs, but Ingeborg remained standing in the light, a pale, faint gleam reaching her from the front door. He did not catch even a glimpse of Andrees, but he saw Ingeborg's face, and he saw in it the look of a bad conscience.

"Where is your sister, Ingeborg?"

"In her room. She is asleep."

"Is she well?"

"She is tired, and wanted to sleep."

"Give her my love. It will do her good. Where are you going?"

"To church," she said, and looked at him.

He gazed on the ground before him, and said slowly—

"It is a sad time. Yesterday I was in the village at Theissens. Little Elsa had just died of pneumonia. She was eight years old, and had a hard death. Liese Nagel is very weary; she has been two years in bed. She thinks she has had trouble enough, and longs for peace, though she is only just thirty-two. Christoph Dwenger was lying drunk under the wall of the Heidehof with his children round him. In this world it seems Ash Wednesday always, wherever we turn. We have need to go to God's house."

She looked at him. "Yes," she said aloud, and he went.

The front door closed heavily behind him. A light wind

was blowing against the house; everything else was still. She turned round in excitement.

"Andrees, come with me."

Her voice seemed to hasten like a child running away breathlessly from something sad. Suddenly she felt herself so fearfully overpowered that her strength failed altogether. She seized his arm and said hurriedly—

"I — cannot do it. I cannot do it. Maria must — must go with you! Wait, Andrees! Wait a moment! Stay here; I will waken her — I — I —"

She tore the key out of her pocket and flew back along the passage, unlocked the door and called loudly and gladly into the room.

"Maria, darling, get up."

The room and the bed were both empty. She returned in some distress, but her whole face seemed to shine with a pure inward light, and Maria Landt's sister had never been more beautiful than at that moment.

"She must be at church, Andrees. Come, we will follow her, the two of us. We will persuade her and you can go by the last train."

"You are very good, Ingeborg."

"Yes! of course I am good! Very good! But not always! That is the worst of Ingeborg Landt." She sprang down the stairs and laughed. "Come quickly, Andrees, or else we shall be too late."

They took their cloaks and hats from the stand to the left of the door and hastened out.

Outside, in her gladness, she laid her hand on his arm and talked as she went beside him.

"How glad I am! How glad I am! Do you know I was angry with you! Through one thing and another! But now everything has turned out well. How happy Maria will be! My Maria! It is the best way, Andrees! We must get her away from these surroundings by main force. When you are once in the town she will be yours. I will send your things after you. You must stay a few days in Hamburg, then you can go on to Berlin and further, and write lovely long letters. I will look after your mother and the housekeeping. That will be nice. Come, let us make haste, there is the bell already."

The light over the Wehl had increased. A great number

of stars were close together and gazed downward on the earth. The wind was stronger. Huge dark trains of clouds crossed the evening sky to the east. Long broad masses of mist hung down from them as if they were walking heavily across the chamber of heaven. On their shoulders they carried something long and dark like a coffin. The stars stood on either side and carried lights. The wind came behind them, singing softly and sadly.

Maria Landt sat on the bridge, crouching down. The little waves, terrified by the strange pageant in the air, were sad and restless; they came up weeping and sobbing and begged for help.

"I cannot help you," she said. "I cannot help myself."

Then the waves grew angry and talked in a different tone and lied and bewildered her. Her heart beat terribly.

Ingeborg and Andrees passed arm in arm, Ingeborg laughing and Andrees looking at her kindly. Maria only gave them a brief, indifferent glance. She was struggling with beings more powerful; visions stood before her of more than mortal size. She bent lower down and looked in the water and lamented.

"I cannot do one thing and I cannot do the other. What good is life to me?"

The wind grew stronger and tore away the veils which covered the moon and flung them aside and the moon gazed into the water. It looked down into the depths.

"They could all of them—if only they had not stones on their hearts . . . Franz and Andrees and Schütt and the widow Thiel. I must get the stones. They are lying there. They are lying there."

The water was full of life, murmuring and rustling, bright and soft. It beckoned her more and more eagerly and enticingly with uncanny power.

"The stones! The stones!"

"Come and take them!"

She dipped her hand in the water.

"Do you see? It is not cold. It is warm and soft, and when it passes over your hand you can feel it is living—yes, living! See! We have been waiting for you for five nights in the moonlight. You have come at last."

White forms appeared among the moving reeds, wonderful quiet eyes looked from between half-closed lids. They

were soft and smooth and gleaming with moisture, they were forms of eternal youth, images of beauty radiant and unspoilt as on the day of creation. They seemed to glide and flow and they spoke softly.

“Why do you speak of suicide? That is a stupid human idea. Don’t you see that we live and float, mount up to the surface and sink, and weep and talk. Are we living or dead?”

“It is sinful.”

“You will exchange restlessness for peace, a stained garment for a white one, weakness for strength and power, and the world below for that above.”

“It is sinful.”

“Then He sinned too; He could have escaped from Golgotha and He did not.”

“If I go they will weep a long time.”

“They will weep and melt and soften — because you have looked for the stones on the green bottom.”

They glided closer — there were two — three — six of them and they had sedge in their hair. The little waves played with their hair and with the sedge. They had great quiet eyes, wonderfully soft and deep, unfathomably deep.

“Go away — I am afraid — afraid.”

“Do you think that we know nothing of human life? The moon talks to us every night; the wind tells us what it has seen on its long journeys. We have made the top of our house bright so that it reflects things. We can see the reflection of the Strandigerhof and of Eschenwinkel and we see the children when they play. And in the mirror of the water everything looks stronger and greater and more beautiful than in the thin air. We do not only look at things; we see right into them. Don’t you see the moon and the stars? They are lying here in the pond.”

“Father! Father!”

“The Father is here too — you know that.”

“I will go to church again and sing with them —

“‘Keep with us in glory,  
Great light, we implore,  
With thy truth for our fortress,  
We wander no more.’

I feel ill — take hold of me — so that I sha’n’t fall — ”

They glided up quickly — the whole six. Among the stalks of the reeds one appeared with a golden circlet on her bright, dripping hair.

"Take hold of her. — Carry her. — She is too gentle and tender for this earth. Gently — gently — lay her down — now she will sleep."

Above on the road Anna hastened past; she looked at the bridge, looked again in terror, screamed and ran to Eschenwinkel. Antje was alone in the room.

"Has Maria Landt passed here?"

"No!"

"Then — then she is in the Wehl and it is my fault." And she flung herself on her knees by the table.

Antje was going to run past her but she sprang up and put herself in the way.

"Don't you understand?" she screamed. "Franz Strandiger and I, we have killed her."

"Franz Strandiger and you?"

The pure woman repulsed her with both hands; her beautiful worn face grew proud, and she told how she and Heinrich had said "good-bye" at the chamber door when he went to the war.

Anna Witt turned round and tried to rush out. Her father stood behind her on the threshold in his linen smock frock, the wet clay shining on his boots. He had dashed his spade on the floor, he shook it to and fro, and his face, usually so quiet, was frenzied with distress.

She leaned against the table and looked at him in anguish.

"Where is Maria Landt?" he cried.

"In the Wehl! In the Wehl!"

At the same time the bells had stopped ringing; the choir was made up of twelve children, who sat near the organ; they began to sing Gellert's hymn in their clear voices.

"How great the goodness of our God."

Ingeborg, as she sometimes did, had taken her seat with them and joined in. She had a clear, ringing voice, and when she began to sing her cheeks flushed and her eyes grew full

of light. And how she sang to-day! With that happy, laughing, rejoicing conscience!

Andrees sat under the organ, in the second of those uncomfortable pews which bore on their sides the coat armour of old extinct country families; he looked at his hymn-book and sang quietly. During the hymn, and with his mind wholly intent on it, he grew more peaceful; and when they reached the end of the third verse he was calmer than he had been for long. And though all was not clear to him — there was a great, unfathomable mystery still — everything seemed great and noble, eternal, full of a golden wonder. He felt that the view of life expressed in those three verses gave the simplest and finest meaning to the riddle of the world, and that his own life, if he clung to that meaning, would win reality and value once again. And memory sat by him and told him of old, forgotten services when he had been a boy sitting at his mother's side in the family pew, and it seemed to him possible that, if he truly desired it, he could once again find joy in such things, a pure and great and childlike joy. Then his eyes would grow clear and far-seeing, and he would know what he had to do in life.

Behind him the wind rattled the shutters and blew against the wall, and then fled lamenting over the graves into the open country. His eyes sought Maria in the Strandiger pew, but he could see nothing, for half of the pew was in darkness.

Steps and voices approached from outside, from the clock tower. They came up the path, stopped, and there was talking; it seemed as if they were about to pass the church, but were disputing among themselves. Every one listened.

Pastor Frisius stopped on his way to the chancel, his pale suffering face showing that he was disturbed. Some people bent down in their pews in bewilderment; others, who understood better, looked at each other in concern. Old Klaus Peters, who is still alive, got up and went to the door. They all thought the same thing, that some people had been celebrating Shrove Tuesday too vigorously, had carried on their celebrations into Ash Wednesday itself, and now, beside themselves with the brandy, had sunk so low as to think of disturbing God's service.

Pastor Frisius plainly heard Schütt's voice, so he laid his

Bible on the font and descended the stairs. Several men accompanied him, all with grave faces. As they opened the door and stepped out they first saw Schütt, who had a bottle in his hand, and behind him the widow Thiel, her scanty white hair hanging round her in disorder. Behind them again was the bier which had been brought from the clock tower, and on the bier —

The organ broke off suddenly, like a sea-gull shot on the wing in the midst of its cry.

Frissius wept aloud like a child, and others wept with him. Old men stood with quiet, pale faces and looked silently on the dead.

From the side-path there thronged men and women and a number of children, crying aloud.

Pellwormer, overcome at the sight of Frissius in tears, seized the pastor's arm and began to sing: "What God does that is done well."

Frissius interrupted. "But what men do is not done well. Who has brought the dear child to this?"

Hans Rohde, who was always tranquil, laid his hand on the pastor's arm.

"Why think that? She must have fallen in; it was dark and rainy. One could not see properly. And she was so often absent-minded, and she had headache. She did not see where she was going."

"No. That is not true."

People talked among themselves.

"They have driven her to it. Those up there. Yes, we know they have." They named no names.

"If Strandiger had not let the Hof —"

"Then — yes, then —"

"Maria Landt would be living still."

"Lost her way in the darkness? There are willows the whole way along the Wehl! Why should she go to the bridge? Nonsense!"

"Andrees Strandiger!"

He stood suddenly in the door and stared at the bier with dreadful eyes.

Ingeborg flew down the steps from the organ, cried aloud, and threw herself on the bier as if some one had flung her there. The children cried loudly; some ran screaming over

the graves like hunted things. The darkness grew deeper. They could see only the more plainly what lay in the faint light from the open church door, the bier with Ingeborg crouched by it, clinging to the strong rough sides, with the water dripping from her hand, and they could see too the man in the church door.

A voice said: "He is to blame for it all."

Reimer Witt said to Frisius: "Where shall we take the body?"

Ingeborg raised her head, and when she saw *him* standing there she cried —

"You woman's slave! Away with you. Why do you stare at her so, wretched man? It is you, you who have killed her. Drive him away!"

"Be quiet."

"She speaks out!"

The women stood and looked at the still, white face; some felt at her pulse and heart and bent down to listen. One took her apron off and covered the body. Ingeborg lay without stirring.

"She must have had a stroke. The cold water —"

"Have you heard . . . Anna Witt?"

"Be quiet."

"It all goes together."

Frisius could not understand what Reimer Witt said to him.

"We did not take her to the Strandigerhof, because of the sick lady. Haller's door was locked. We thought —"

"Yes, yes." Frisius nodded hastily, forgot what he was about to say, and added: "I have a right to her."

Ingeborg got up heavily. "Yes, uncle, to you. Not in that wretched house! I hate him and the whole house and the years we have lived there, my Maria and I."

Frisius gripped her arm; he stared in her face and said hoarsely —

"And you, why did you stand by the stairs with those wicked eyes? Look at me! You are guilty, and you are her sister."

She turned in his hands; in her horror she did not know where to look, and as she glanced round she saw Andrees Strandiger going slowly and bent down.

"Andrees!" she cried, "I will go with you."

But he went towards the heath with the same heavy step, like a wounded man whose boots are filled with his own blood.

The men raised the bier and carried it among the crosses to the vicarage. Frisius walked by it, steadying it with his hand. Ingeborg stood still and tried to think clearly. One moment she felt as if she had the whole fearful burden on her whole soul; then again she thought of the gladness which had filled her heart when she was trying to take her sister to Andrees. She drew a deep breath and said slowly—

"I wished to do wrong, but I was kept from doing it."

Dwenger's wife seized her hand and said with sympathy: "Come, Ingeborg!" Some women stepped up to her sobbing, but she would not stay. Then the women went on slowly, but stayed under the poplar which stood at that time on the left of the lych gate. The moon was hidden behind clouds which were driven eastwards across the sky, and the whole churchyard was covered with misty darkness, all round it men and women wandered up and down as if distraught.

Late that night, about ten o'clock, Ingeborg went to the vicarage. At the door Franz Strandiger met her and passed her in silence. She opened sadly the door of the best room and went in to the body; it lay between two rows of lighted candles in silver candlesticks and the bier was covered with white linen. The housekeeper and Reimer, both in their best clothes, were keeping watch. She stood by the head of the bier and wept for a long time, so helplessly and despairingly, with such bitter grief, that the old woman embraced her tenderly and led her to Frisius.

When, an hour later, she returned to the Strandigerhof she found Heim sitting by the blind woman's bed, and Frau Strandiger was crying.

That night there were many lighted windows in the village and in Eschenwinkel. Many people kept watch till after midnight; over the wood came a faint gleam of dawn. A pale hand stretched from the east across the wood and put out the stars which were standing above the heath.

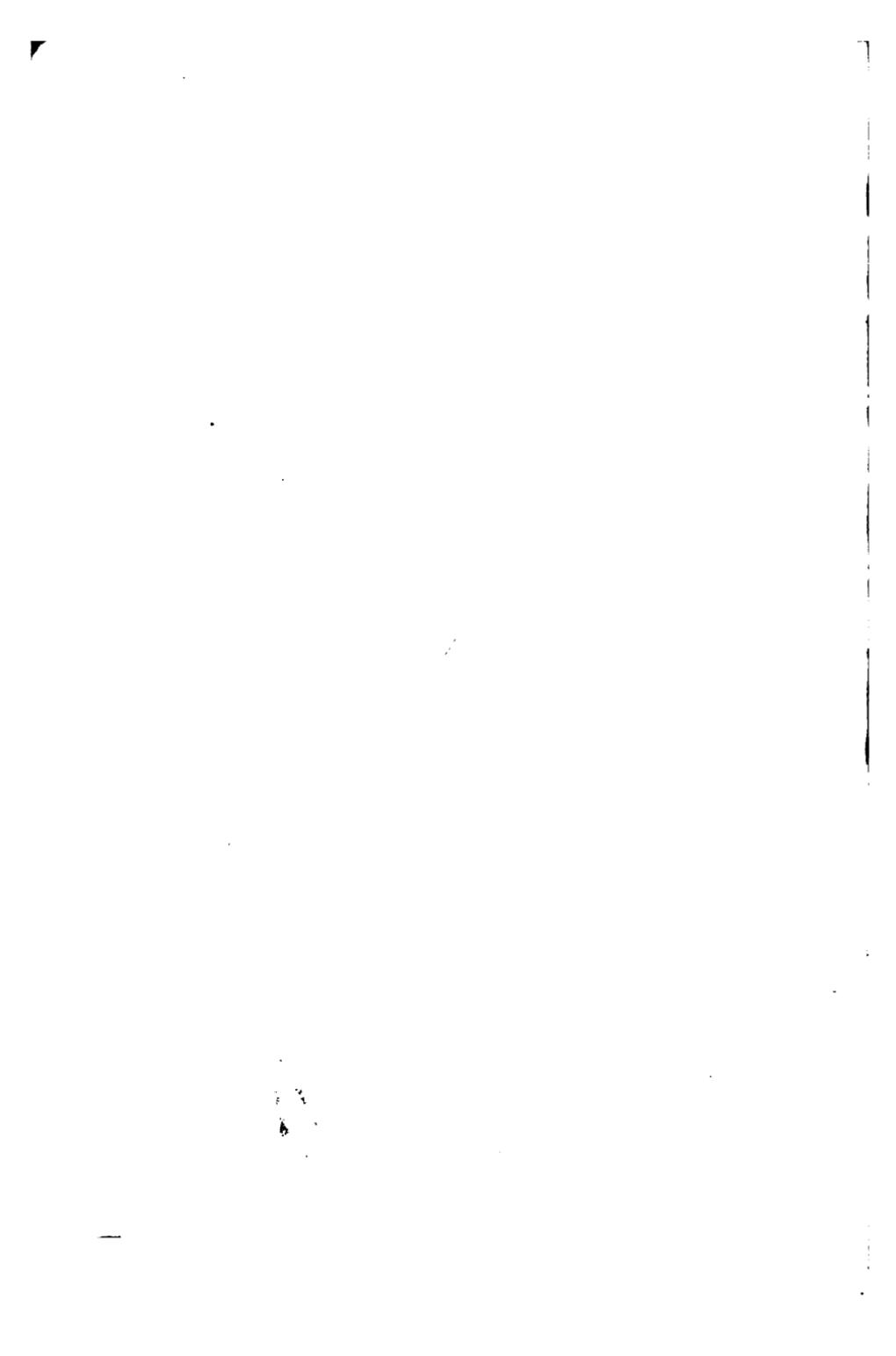
Pellwormer, who was so poor at speaking and so good at singing, was making his last journey from the Strandigerhof

along the Wehl. He was singing the dawn song. Fragments of it, blown by the wind, reached even the people who were crossing the Watt —

“The clock has struck four,  
It is four by the clock.  
The day drives away the dark night,  
Dear Christians, awake and be bright  
And praise God the Lord.”



**BOOK III.**



## CHAPTER I.

THEY went westwards over the wild Watt. In that land you cannot hear the song of a bird or a human voice, or see a blade of grass. It is grey and bare. As on the morning of the first day. But on that day the command was heard, "Let there be!"

The Watt is not dead; there is nothing more living than the Watt. The work of creating and building goes on day and night. If you lie down you can hear the breathing of the Watt, a quiet, rippling breathing and flowing, heaving and expanding. The people on the shore say that they can sometimes see a man far out in the Watt. With his short net over his shoulder he stands by the Priel, his sleeves rolled up and his legs bare to the knee. The tide comes and rises higher, but he does not move. He stands in perfect calmness at his work, and you can see how he throws the fish into the basket behind.

The people on the shore do not see elves and fairies and such pretty, harmless things. The people on the shore see weird figures of more than mortal size. They say the man in the Watt is a fisherman who, when he was alive, cared nothing for either God or man; many a time he used to go fishing in the Watt when the church-bells were ringing. Now he is condemned to toil in the Watt for ever.

Antje went before them, and told this story in a loud voice, and laughed mysteriously.

"People know no better," she said. "It is not a wicked spirit which stands in the Watt; just the opposite. It is God Himself! He works on the Dieksander Plaat with sleeves rolled up, and walks barefooted over the Watt. Yes, it is true. 'And rested on the seventh day.' But on the eighth He began again. And so I am never afraid when I cross the Watt alone or stay in Flackelholm."

But do you know what Heim Heiderieter says? Heim who thinks himself so clever. It is this —

## THE WATT SPIRIT

So grey and wide the Watt lies there,  
The west wind blows with warm, soft air,  
"Come, child! We will be going.  
The Watt awakes and waters come.  
Give me the net! We will go home,  
See o'er the sand it's flowing."

"No, father, no! See far away,  
Where lightning gleams on the water grey,  
A man o'er the ocean bending.  
I am not eager to get to shore,  
For ere to mother we go once more,  
We'll have a good catch for ending."

"My child, the face of the watcher there  
Is filled with sin and deep despair,  
God's anger ever enduring.  
On many a dark and gloomy night  
He misleads the fishers with his light,  
Their wand'ring steps alluring.

"From the Elbe at night must he come forth,  
For a short sad space of life on earth,  
Over the sand in the gloaming.  
He calls aloud through his hollowed hand,  
The water mounts, it is dark on land,  
To the shore there's no home-coming.

"And in the day with the falling tide,  
He still goes wand'ring far and wide,  
With treach'rous hatred burning;  
He stands and fishes with patient care,  
And the fisherman sees and follows there,  
But alas! there's no returning."

The boy laughed out in his clever way.  
"Ah, father! what stupid things to say;  
Such tales are idle dreaming!  
For all the world is clearly known,  
We'll wait until our net we've thrown  
There, where the fish are streaming."

Again their nets in the water foam,  
They forget the dyke, they forget their home,  
And far away go roaming.  
The water rose, the west wind sighed,  
The wild waves over their bodies cried,  
And mother wept in the gloaming.

"But in one place I am afraid, Andrees. Up there. I will tell you after."

She took his horse by the bridle and stepped before it into the water of the Priel. Dark flying clouds covered the moon. Nothing could be seen but the water. Reimer's horse stopped suddenly—it refused to go on, lifting up its head and snuffing with its nostrils. Antje returned and led it in. She looked up at him with a cunning glance and a half-wild laugh, pointing to Andrees.

"Watch what he looks like when I tell him the story."

The water covered the horses' knees; they mounted out of it slowly, and went on quietly over the grey, trackless surface. After a long time they caught sight of the first signpost, a slender birch trunk with greyish-white bark. It had been torn out of the brown heath above; now it had to stand here to point out the way to a few pathless wanderers. They passed it wearily, without noticing; none of them thought how it had once, in its young days, stood in the sunshine in silver-white garments, with a plume of green, trembling twigs, and looked over the heath from the edge of the wood. The west wind blew against the wanderers, and rustled the short bare twigs of the birch. It grew still darker.

Andrees stared before him in silence. Reimer tried to find something he knew, even the least thing, a shrub or a stone or a human track, but he saw nothing. There were only grey shadows, which stood in the distance like unwieldy figures in the Watt. Then Antje Witt began to speak.

"It was here, Andrees! Your father was drowned here when he was coming from Flackelholm. At first we couldn't tell what it was that he kept shouting from the Watt to the dyke. At last we understood what he called. 'Bring the black horse.' It was the strongest horse in the stable. Reimer was then the boy at your house, and he ventured. But the black horse sank in the mud, it could scarcely tear itself free,

and it galloped back over the dyke with its mane bristling. They tried other things. They couldn't get the boat along, it stuck in the mud like lead. In the evening your mother and I sat for two hours on the dyke listening to his voice. Do you know what was the last thing he called? 'Never let our child cross the Watt.' Ha, ha!"

Andrees settled himself firmly on his horse. Antje looked at her brother with sparkling eyes.

"When does the tide come, Andrees?" Reimer asked.

He did not answer. He was living through his whole life. He remembered how, when he was a little boy, he had stood beside his mother on the dyke, and she had repeated hastily, twice over —

"Never go into the Watt, Andrees. Never go into the Watt. I have only one child."

Antje took hold of his horse's rein; now and again her shoulder touched his foot.

"Why did you come with me, you unhappy creature? You are much too good and religious. Do you know who ought to go with me? Lena Strandiger, my heart's darling. Walk your feet sore, Lena! Take off your gay dress and lie down on the hard banks of shells; that shall be your punishment. We will live in Flackelholm all our lives, but never speak to each other; not even look at each other. And the two huts on the shore are a long way apart. What would you say to that, Lena?"

He looked down on her, seized her abundant hair with his hand, and bent her head back. He saw Antje's laughing face.

"Ah! You?" he murmured. "What do you want on Flackelholm?"

Antje turned round. "We must go forward and a little to the right; then we shall soon come to the cross stake."

They went on.

"I can see nothing yet, Antje. When does the stake come?"

Antje raised her hand. "Do you see? It is there. I have not gone one single step wrong. There is the path!"

"The path?" said Strandiger, raising his head. "Why do you talk of a path? I can't see either a path or a stake."

"There are paths everywhere, Andrees; but only one is the right one."

"Sometimes two, Mrs. Wisdom."

"No," said Antje. "The others all lead into the quicksand."

"Be quiet, I can hear nothing."

He struck his hand on the saddle. "Where is this new land?"

"It is still two hours away."

They sank into silence. After awhile he raised his head again; a restless light flickered in his eyes.

"I am afraid of the night," he said, shrinking.

They went onwards step by step, now over broad, wet, sandy spaces, where the hoofs of the horses hardly sank in at all, now over white beds of shells stretching for great distances. Then they came to a space where the water ran in short, swift waves; some day it would be a broad, fruitful field, where trees and houses would stand and the plough make furrows, and the children dance in rings. Some time. A hundred years hence. It is still sleeping.

From the west, from the far distance, there came a heavy sound like distant continuous thunder rolling along, but Antje listened, turned a little more towards the north, and pointed in the direction of the roar. At first they did not understand what she said till they heard that it was the Norderelbe, whose waves were surging against the shore of the Watt. Then they saw in the glimmering distance three or four masses of light, large ships on their way to Heligoland.

Their journey seemed endless, and they could have believed that there was no land anywhere, no green grass, nor human dwellings. The inhabited earth seemed so far away, and the still, grey Watt so limitless. They went on for two hours after they had passed the cross stake. Antje stepped forward confidently and calmly; she saw in her mind's eye the whole path they had traversed. She knew well enough — she could have pointed with her finger — where Flackelholm lay. The noise of the surf had only told her that she was in the right direction. Then they saw in front of them the last channel, recognizing it by its larger waves.

"Do you see?" said Antje. "We are going quite right. That is the river Flack from which Flackelholm gets its name. Do you see the boats there? Those are the sturgeon fishers. They come across from Hanover to the Priel; they will be

your nearest neighbours, Andrees. We shall soon be at Flackelholm now."

"I see nothing," he said. "When will the sun come?"

As he strained his eyes to look in front, a clear light came from behind, from the old land, and the dawn crossed the earth with its airy footsteps. The clouds and the Watt shone with the light from its scarlet locks. He stretched out his hand and said with a sob —

"I can see Flackelholm. It floats on the water."

On the other side of the channel, in the distance, there was a narrow, dark streak like a faint line; behind showed an irregular row of white hills with a pale glimmer. Far around on the horizon, between the hills, and in the hollow where the dark morning mist still brooded, there were great gloomy masses like woods or old fortifications or a dark wall of earth. The whole scene seemed to have the grave expectant mood of the second morning of creation.

They rode close together through the river Flack. Andrees gazed silently at the new country before him; Reimer, who was bewildered by the quickly flowing water, looked up at the sky; Antje went slowly, but with perfect carelessness and confidence through the cold water, which was nearly waist deep. On the other side of the stream the Watt grew higher. The earth was firmer, though it was still nothing but grey mud. Then came the first green island, two or three yards broad, raised only a single foot above the Watt, with the tide washing round it and, as it were, devouring it away on all sides. Then there came the true land, already enlivened by the first shy flowers and clothed with herbage.

Andrees grew pale and gazed straight before him; his hands were clenched on his saddle-bow. They rode towards the sand-hills. Then the hills seemed to withdraw somewhat; the sun opened its eyes: there in the shelter of the dunes lay a hut, built of stranded wood, and by it another smaller one, a block hut made of boards. A great bamboo stem which had been cast up was fixed on the roof as a chimney, though it could hardly have been fireproof. On the other side was a strong mast for a flagstaff.

Andrees Strandiger dismounted from his horse and spent that day wandering restlessly over the sand-hills and the endless shore. Towards evening the wind rose with the tide, and

by ten o'clock there was a storm. That was the night when the Dutch boat *Kuff*, the great, broad tar-covered ship, was driven against the Büsener dyke; the captain was very much surprised, and thought he had arrived somewhat near Cuxhaven. The whole shore laughed at him. From the distance across the dunes came the fearful roar and thunder of the surf, and the storm howled like raging, shrieking men. They leapt through the sand with their heavy feet and laughed wildly and struck savagely with their fists against the beams. They sprang from the sand-hills on to the roof and seized the chief post, and shook the strong beams till the hut trembled. It seemed as if they all wanted to get in to Andrees Strandiger and tell him how his father had died, how his mother was sitting at home weeping, and what Maria Landt had wanted to say to him — Maria who lay on her bier.

In this way the fierce spirits attempted to guard the lonely country against the coming of men, and to terrify them with their wild songs.

That night, when the storm raged till dawn, Ingeborg sat crouched together on the blind woman's bed, holding converse with herself. She tried to understand what lay behind her — her life, her mistakes, and her experiences — and she was not indulgent to herself. She recognized that she lived in the sunshine, and had never thought of storm. She recognized that she had no deep conviction, and that she had not been quick enough to profit by experience. She understood that her religion, of which she had been so proud, had been only a Sunday garment, like Joseph's coat of many colours, valueless in the rain and cold. But she was still young; she was strong and full of vigour. She was very far from despairing; that night she set to work to weave the every-day garment of her life and to make it strong and firm.

## CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT later Heim was returning from Flackelholm with Reimer Witt. He had been there five days. They stopped at the Heidehof, but did not get down. On one side Eva Walt appeared, stepped up to the cart in her quick way, and looked silently and with gleaming eyes at Heim Heiderieter. He saw that she must have been anxious about him. Her eyes had been so sad when he went away, and now they were very happy. That made him glad.

Schoolmaster Haller came out of the school door, bare-headed, and asked how the inhabitants of Flackelholm were doing. Heim reported that his friend was terribly depressed.

"You know," he said to Haller, "how reserved he is, so that one cannot say what he feels. He is not working yet," and he pointed to his heart, "but he will begin."

"Where are you going, sir?" asked Eva.

He turned to her, looked down at her fresh, blooming face, and felt delighted with his handsome housemate, and glad that he could return to any one so kind.

"The sea air seems to have done you good," he said.

She nodded and answered: "I have good friends and kind neighbours. The little Witts have visited me, and I was invited twice to the schoolmaster's."

"We invited our neighbour," said Haller, "and got on very well; she must come again."

"Where are you going, sir?"

"Reimer Witt has left me to go to his children. I am going on to the town to see if I can buy two good horses for Andrees and Reimer will take them back to Flackelholm this evening at ebb tide. He is eager that they should be taken to-day, and I need my own horses for myself."

"Of course," she said. "You have still a good deal of land to get ready?"

He laughed, nodded to each side, and went on.

Reimer had got down and vanished in his house. The children's loud shouts announced his arrival. They were all standing round Telsche Spieker, who was bending over the wash-tub with her sleeves rolled up. Two minutes later Reimer sat in his armchair by the window, with a child on each knee, and they were telling him that Heim Heiderieter's Telsche had cooked big boiled puddings, and Gustav said: "The new mother must stay here!" Before him was a big cup of hot coffee, the room was clean, the April sun shone in at the little window, and Telsche Spieker went on washing and appeared not to notice him.

When Heim returned in the afternoon he had two strong young horses, brown in colour, fastened behind his cart. Late in the afternoon Reimer set out with a light heart for Flackelholm, taking with him all kinds of household furniture and provisions. He took little Fritz with him; the others could not miss school.

When Heim Heiderieter entered his big room, tired and hungry, he was astonished. Eva Walt had spent the six days in thoroughly cleaning the old house. The floor, of white boards, showed once again the true nature of the wood, its large grain and knots; the two powerful beams in the ceiling, roughly cut and with rounded edges, had regained all their long-lost polish. The books had been ranked neatly, as if to greet their master, and all the papers and pamphlets that were worth keeping had been arranged inside blue covers, divided according to their contents. His mother's work-table, which stood before the window on the left, was covered with a pretty brown cloth, and to the right of the passage door, on the old chest, there stood a Russian samovar of copper, brightly polished; it had been his grandmother's daily pride and joy, and now served as an heirloom to decorate her grandson's room. Two valuable old porcelain vases stood, daintily and respectfully, one on each side of the great samovar; they were shaped like urns, and painted with lovely red roses.

Heim Heiderieter stood by the table and shook his head, then he turned round in amazement. Eva, who had remained at the door, said a little shyly —

"I found those handsome old things in the chest which stands under the roof and, if you look there, sir, you will find

many others that are valuable. I saw some old books written in a very close, upright hand, but it is fine handwriting like they teach now in the schools, from the seventeenth century."

"How do you know that?"

She smiled a little. "I used to see such writing in the church books. When I was a child I played sometimes in a pastor's study."

Heim Heiderieter looked at her as if he wished to search her through, and she hung her head.

"And the chest," she said quickly, "has wonderful carving; you ought to bring it here too."

He laughed brightly. "I search everywhere for old things; my father did the same before me, but we neither of us thought of finding out if we had any in our own house. That is so like us. Tell me, how did you get so practical? You are quite young!"

"I had to manage for myself when I was very young."

"Even when you were a child?"

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly, and looked at him entreatingly, as if she said, "Don't ask me any more!"

He stepped up to his mother's work-table and, without thinking, raised the little covers from its compartments. In one he saw some new black thread and two bright needles. The sun shone cheerfully in at the window. The loveliest April day covered the heath; blue mist lay like a light veil round the distant green wood. Here in his absence she had come to sit in the evening, when she was tired, after her work. He turned to her. She stood shyly by the table where she had placed the coffee service.

"Won't you use this little work-table?" he said hesitatingly. "My mother used to sit by it so often."

"May I take it to my room?"

He looked up quickly. "If you want to? But I should be glad if you would sit here in my mother's place; it would be nice for some one to sit there again, when it has been empty so long and you —"

He was silent.

She looked at him questioningly, crimsoned, and went on laying the table.

"Thank you," she said.

In some embarrassment he went to the side door. He saw that the key was in the lock. She was watching him, and came up to him.

"You forgot to take the key out, sir. I have given the room a good cleaning. It needed it!"

His hand was already on the door. "I know that," he said. "But there were many little things there. They were not all fully labelled, and their position meant a good deal! I hope you have not been too eager."

"I don't think so, sir. I put everything back in its place as exactly as one can with the naked eye."

He looked round at her to see if she had not at least the suspicion of a mocking smile, then he entered the long room and she followed him.

Every single thing lay there as it had always done; the stone knife with which our forefathers cut up the game and which they used on winter afternoons to make the first rough carvings on the ashen spear shafts. There lay peacefully side by side those very same pointed arrows which had perhaps been shot in enmity against each other when long ago in some woodland clearing they hissed from the bows. There lay two neat, pointed splinters of flint, like small daggers. Perhaps the most industrious and skilful of all the artists in stone had made them and taken them to the hut of his chief, as a plaything for the chief's child? Or had they been pins for the child's mother to pin the coarse garment over her breast? There lay a sword of bronze, some four fingers in breadth, straight, and the length of a man's arm; it had been a strong weapon once, but was broken in the middle. Had the rust broken it during its silent work of two thousand years, or had it broken in the last battle on the heath? And there lay uncovered on the table a golden bracelet.

"Sir!" said Eva, "under this bracelet you have written — do you see? — 'Three golden bracelets.' But there was only one there! Wasn't there?"

Heim bent his curly head and stared at the yellow bracelet as if he had never seen it before.

"Yes?" he said; "thereby hangs a tale. There really were three; one is lying here; the second I might possibly get — I lost it. The third I gave away!"

"Gave away!" She struck her hands lightly together.

"But people who collect old things don't do that. I have heard that they never give anything away."

He wrinkled his brow and looked very important. "I didn't know much about such things then; I was only a boy."

"What a pity! I am sorry."

He drew himself up and looked at her. "No! I am not sorry. The happiest memory of my childhood is connected with that bracelet."

Eva Walt turned round quickly and went to the other table. He looked after her and felt displeased that she did not ask him what memory it was, for he wanted to tell her. But his vexation passed away, for she looked so bright and pure, so much in place framed in that bright old room. She had dark wavy hair crowned with plaits, brown eyes and a vigorous rounded face; she wore a loose dark blouse and a neat short skirt; there was nothing of the fashionable world about her, but her blooming youth seemed to belong to the strong, cheerful room, with its three hundred years of age, and to those people who had made it, people who had gained everything — food and clothes and philosophy of life — from the house and the peaceful village with its fields and the prospect over the sea.

And as he looked at her, he felt a keen desire to bind to himself for life that fresh youth and that independent but home-loving nature.

When she turned to him again his eyes were fixed on her; and since, frank as he was, he could hide nothing, she knew at once what he was thinking. A wave of hot confusion covered her face and she turned away. His heart beat loudly and he had as little idea as she what he should say. Perhaps at that very moment they would have come to an explanation, but a sound reached her ear — a low rushing, clattering noise, and saved her for the time being. She turned round and went quickly out of the room. She was gone.

He heard the sound, and when he recognized it, he laughed a little and, half in vexation and half in relief, muttered in his beard: "If the kettle had not boiled over, what would have become of you by now, Heim Heiderieter." He looked again towards the table, stepped up to it once more, took the golden bracelet, stretched it out and weighed it on his flat hand, then he said: "It is the best thing to do."

He went back into the big room, sat at his writing-table and wrote down some ideas which had occurred to him at Flackelholm. But nothing would come right, for he was always asking: "What is she doing now? What is she thinking of now?" In his mind's eye he saw all the time her embarrassed face and tried to understand what she thought, especially what she thought about him and his house and Eschenwinkel, and whether she would like to stay there. He heard her come out of the kitchen; she went to her room and shut the door; he knew she was making herself tidy for the afternoon. She would be standing in that little clean room which he had looked into so curiously the week before; now she would be standing at the window, combing her hair, looking out at the sunny heath and thinking—thinking of what? Of her childhood? Of her home? Of Heim Heiderieter?

He got up from his writing-table and went round the big table with long, slow steps. The house was quite still; his man was outside in the fields.

Then at that moment there came again the sharp rushing noise from the kitchen, and for the second time the teakettle, with excessive zeal, took upon itself to interfere in Heim Heiderieter's life. For a moment he stood still in doubt and listened, but did not hear the swift, quiet opening of a door. The water poured hissing into the fire. Then he hastened to the kitchen with his long strides. When he looked in, she was standing at the hearth before the fire, the bright sunlight was shining into the room and her hair was hanging loose over her white shoulders.

She did not look at him, but she only said gently and entreatingly: "Sir!—"

Then he went out again and immediately afterwards he was standing in the big room by the window, shaking his head; he was sorry this unpleasant thing had happened. He knew she would be distressed and perhaps cry; but he did not say a word in blame of the kettle. Then he went out across the heath and thought over the past and the future, and finally he thought only of the future, and said to himself: "It is the best thing that could happen to me."

When he returned home she was sitting in the big room by his mother's work-table, stitching busily; she did not raise

her head but said with a light laugh, and as quickly as if she wished to anticipate him—

“It is very pleasant sitting here at your dear mother’s little table. Such good thoughts come to me and when I look up I can see as far as the Wodanshill.”

He did not answer; he went to and fro several times, and when he turned to her he looked at her doubtfully. She had bent down over her work and her heart was beating. They both knew that the most important and loveliest thing possible was advancing towards them, but they neither of them dared to advance a step.

She could bear it no longer; distress and hope, and love and fear, tortured her. She got up and went to the door. There they met, and he stopped her so that she was compelled to look at him.

“Eva!” he said, and all his love and all his tenderness was expressed in the brief name.

“Yes,” she said gently and with difficulty. “Yes, I am willing, sir, everything; I love you very much.”

“Don’t say sir!” And whilst he entreated her he stood reverently before her and stroked her hand.

“I —” she said, “I have something to tell you — if you love me.”

“What is it?”

“I will tell you this evening, I must get supper now.”

He let her pass and remained behind alone.

After supper, which Heim’s man took with them, she went into the big room and said with a somewhat husky voice—

“If you can come for a walk over the heath, sir, I have time now.”

He sprang up at once, took his cap from the hook near the door, and went with her. As they passed through the garden they were met by the scent of the heath. The fresh moist breath of the spring covered the whole quiet surface. The sun was above the sea, large, and fiery red. There was no breath of wind; it seemed as if everything, every plant of heather and broom, every single bird was listening for what Eva Walt would say. Drawing a deep breath she began to tell him the story of her life.

“I am not so very young now,” she said; “I shall soon

be five and twenty, and I have gone through a great deal. There has been nothing wrong, sir, except two things, and you must decide for yourself if there is anything wrong in them."

He nodded and looked very grave and wise. She glanced sideways at him, and it almost seemed as if there was a touch of mischief, happy but shy, hovering round her lips.

"I come of poor people; my father was a carpenter and he lived in a small parish not far from Marburg. It was not his home for he had been born in Lippe. His home was so poor that he had been compelled to leave. In that village he found work and a wife; afterwards he bought a house and got on. I can remember very little of my father. My mother died when my little brother was born and the baby died too. I was six years old then. Soon after, my father injured himself with the scythe, when he was mowing the grass by the brook. I remember he was very ill, he died on the ninth or tenth day, the women came into the house and petted me, and cried over me, and a word was spoken very often which I had never heard before — 'an orphan.' I remember how the coffin and its train vanished among the great leaves of the lime-tree avenue; we must have lived near a linden avenue on the steep side of a hill, and it must have been about autumn when I lost my father. The pastor of the village and his wife had no children. They were touched by my helplessness, and the very same evening that my father was laid to rest in the churchyard, I was put to bed in the Frau Pastor's bedroom. They looked after me well for eight years, till I was fourteen. Then for the second time came what we call a misfortune. The pastor visited all the sick people in the village, and was afraid of nothing, absolutely nothing. He was stately and vigorous, and still young, and people said that in Berlin he might have made a captain in the Kaiser's grenadiers. One day when he came home, he had been visiting some one who had a most infectious fever."

Her voice broke, she shook her dark head and the quick tears flowed over her cheeks.

"I can't bear to think of it, and yet I can't forget it. It was too sad. The strong man fought against illness, but the sickness seized him treacherously as if from an ambush; through the whole course of the fever he showed such a strong, happy faith. It was a great grief, but a joy too; and how they clung

together, his wife and he. How amazed she was when they told her that she ought not to nurse him herself, that it ought to be some old woman. I was only a young thing, I did not understand, and did nothing but cry. He died, and four days afterwards she died too. For the second time it was 'Tie up your bundle, wench;' but, though I did not know it, I took with me out of the quiet, empty house the faith whose power I had seen and felt there for eight whole years and then for those eight days. Since then, sir, I have always been strong and happy, for I fear neither death nor anything else.

"But I had to leave the pastor's house. They gave me a bundle in my hand and promised to send my box after me. Where was I to go? I had two or three distant relatives on my father's side. So I was put on the train, and after a long day's journey came to Detmold; I saw the Grotenburg in the twilight, I was received kindly by strangers, simple people, and fell asleep, wearied out and crying with homesickness. But my relatives' kindness did not last long. It was only afterwards I learnt why they turned so harsh to me. My uncle, my father's brother, never said a severe word to me, but never a kind one either. The poor man was a weak creature and had to obey his wife. I learnt later that she had believed I had inherited a good deal from my parents as well as from the pastor and his wife, and so would be a help to their household. But what I had was secured till I came of age, and they soon learnt that they could get nothing except a little for my board. And now a time began that was very disagreeable, though it did not last long. When spring came my uncle gathered together men and women from the village, and without my being asked, we all set out one day to Detmold to go north from there. You know thousands of people from Lippe go north and east every year and spend the summer as brickmakers, working hard, in miserable huts, with wretched food. We went north."

They had come to the Wodanshill and they went up. He was very thoughtful, his lips were pressed together and he restrained himself with difficulty.

They stood on the summit, and she looked as if seeking something. Her face worked and her lips quivered. She stretched her hand out, looked back to him and her eyes were full of tears.

"There, sir—I sat on that stone and you stood there."

"Eva!" he cried, and seized his head with his hands, and caught her hand and kissed it and cried again, "Eva! Eva!" as if everything were explained by that one word, everything he had felt then and everything that moved him so deeply now; his eyes glowed with joy.

"There," she said, and put the bracelet in his hand.

"Keep it—it is yours."

"No! Take it back and hear the rest; I shall soon come to the end. When we arrived at the brick-field a letter was given to me. Some relative of the pastor's sent me money and kind wishes; they had been looking for me a long time and I must come to them. So I went back to the south. When I was passing there on the other side of the wood I stood at the window and tried to see the hill, and the brook, and the wood, and cried because I could not. Then I stayed in the house of a doctor near Mainz. I was received very kindly; there was a son of the same age, and they treated me like a child of the house; I grew up and soon took to working quite regularly and busily; I managed the whole of the work in the house and on the little estate, I looked after the cows and the milk which was sent to the city every morning, and superintended the big vegetable-garden; I received no wages, and I think I don't owe much to that family. But when the husband died the house soon grew unbearable. The mother, who had a weakness for money, was afraid that her son might take a fancy to the poor orphan, and the son was cowardly enough to purposely avoid me. If I remember rightly I was only once called away to any amusement, and that was when my presence was useful. The son was a student. One day he came home, and after he had walked up and down for some time in the kitchen-garden asked me to take part in a great festival at his university. He was a student of Heidelberg."

Heim Heiderieter looked at her in confusion. "Heidelberg!"

She thrust him off with both hands. "I could guess pretty well that his mother knew nothing about it, but I was young, and wanted exceedingly to see that very thing. I told myself that there would be a great crowd of students from all parts; and if the boy is still alive with whom you stood on the Wodans-

hill, and if he has gone on reading his old *Odyssey*, then he ought to be a student now."

"Eva! My Eva!"

"Well; and when I was in the procession — for the conceited fellow had taken me to Heidelberg to walk at his side as a citizen's wife — it happened as I went on, looking all round, that I saw you — you, sir — with your head thrown back and your hat far behind. I recognized you by your eyes and your fair hair. Oh! how I nodded and made signs and looked round till I almost made myself conspicuous; but you looked over us away to the great castle, and you did not see your little friend of the brook and the Wodanshill. Stay where you are, sir! When the procession broke up I got together five or six people — they were the merest acquaintances — and went with them from one garden to another and from one inn to another, and they were very glad to go with me because I was happy and excited, and gave them all the kind glances and kind words I could, so that they should not grow weary. And at last I found you. Do you see, sir? I was excited by the noisy, splendid festival, by the stately dress I wore, and all those eyes which looked in mine so happily and fierily — and there were you, you whom I had thought about for ten years, the boy of the heath who had been so close to me then, who belonged to me and to no one else, and to whom I belonged. I felt something wonderful happen to me then. I had been always thinking about the boy, but I had dreamt of him just as a tall youth; only at times I had thought, without realizing what it meant, that he must be a man now. But when I saw you standing there, so tall and proud, taller than all the others, with curly hair and beard, then a fierce fire awoke in me, and in a moment the dreams were changed to love. To see you again and to say good-bye shook me in the same way. What do you say?"

She stood leaning against the stem of the birch-tree, her eyes full of tears, not daring to look up at him.

"What do I say? I am a lucky fellow," he burst out. He caught her to him and held her away again. "She is mine. Do you hear it, heath and wood?"

She looked up at him at last with a look of true, deep happiness, the perfect happiness of a woman who gives herself wholly.

"Now I am yours," she said.

As they went down he clasped the bracelet on her arm and shook his head and laughed; he behaved like a boy, glancing at her shyly to see if she were afraid, and laughed again when she looked into his face with beaming eyes and said repeatedly, "We shall be so happy. We shall be so happy." Then he shook his head once more and looked at her in bewilderment, and said with real distress—

"But tell me how you came here. It is true I have some imagination, but this—"

She laughed happily. "I feel so light-hearted and glad now I have told you. How did I come here? Well, the young man's mother had come to Heidelberg to see her only son in his glory. She saw me beside him. The next day it was, 'Away out of my house!' All the work and service I had given for ten years was forgotten. I went away. Where, do you ask? Where? To the north. First to Hamburg to a friend who was the wife of a merchant there. This merchant had been a fellow pupil of yours at the grammar school and had relatives in your town; he is Mönchshof's nephew."

"Be quiet," he said. "I must think." Suddenly he planted himself firmly before her. "You have always pretended to be so humble—calling me 'sir.'"

She seized his hands and said, laughing shyly: "I might well be humble; I had run after you." She spoke in low tones.

"Tell me how I behaved," he asked, pushing his hat back on his neck and looking across the heath thoughtfully, his forehead wrinkled.

"At first you were very shy. It was something you had not been used to; you had no self-confidence. Then gradually you grew proud. When I was always saying 'sir, sir,' it flattered you, and you pulled yourself together and tried to do honour to your title. Then gradually you came down from your height, and this descent—"

"Go on."

"This descent down to your natural manner was very sweet and dear. Every day I cared for you more. I saw deeper and deeper into your soul."

He took her in his arms, laughing but very shyly. "Come," he said. "We will go home."

There it lay before them on the edge of the heath in the evening light, pleasant-looking and broad, and overgrown like the heath itself. The heath was silent, only here and there was the movement of a bird or a sound wafted from the village by the wind. The whole sky above the sea shone in the evening light, and gilded Heim's hair and the eyes of his betrothed. They went close together through the gap in the wall.

"I will tell you something," said Eva Walt, "before I enter the house as your betrothed. I am not quite poor, for my parents' little inheritance has been carefully preserved. It is about five thousand marks."

"Then you will be a rich bride for Heim Heiderieter."

"And besides, we are young and strong."

He shrugged his shoulders as if he had not much confidence in himself.

She made a sudden movement with her hands, as women do in the country when they turn and knead dough.

"I can turn you round like this," she said, "and make what I like out of you."

"Well, well." He opened the door and let her pass before him. As he was about to follow her into the dark passage, he heard her voice from her bedroom door.

"Good night, sir!"

There was a light, ringing laugh, and the sound of a bolt being shot.

### CHAPTER III.

A STILL white mist covered Flackelholm. A soft wind blew from the land towards the rising tide. Everywhere the cries of sea-gulls sounded in the air, and from the northwest came the heavy thunder and roar of the sea, but the surf was hidden by the mist.

Andrees Strandiger stood on the dunes among the coarse grass, and looked out into the mist. Something was always labouring within him; by day when he was awake, and at night in his dreams. That night he had dreamt again that he had gone into the Watt and got lost, and been unable to find Flackelholm. He had sought everywhere for the earth, for firm land, but found only the soft mud. Now he was awake he still tormented himself, asked ceaselessly about the why and the wherefore, where he had come from and where he was going to, and could find no answer and no firm land.

That was what he wanted — a foundation, something firm to build a new life on.

He turned round to the hut which stood sideways at the foot of the dunes; Ingeborg Landt was sitting there on the bench under the window; she was looking away over the quiet green land, her hands folded in her lap, lost in dreams. She had come to Flackelholm yesterday with Reimer Witt.

“She has come here to help me.”

She turned her head and looked at him. Then she got up resolutely, and came quickly down through the deep sand of the dunes. The wind blew her dress lightly on one side.

“Andrees, can I go with you?”

“What good is it?” He turned away. “You ought to have stayed with my mother.”

“Oh, Andrees! please don’t drive me away. I will go as soon as I see that you are yourself again. You ought at least to speak to me.”

He shook his head with an expression of despair, and was about to leave her.

She began to cry bitterly. "I wanted to help us both, but you won't let me!"

"Why did you come here? No one can help me! I am the most useless man in the world!"

"I am your sister. Your mother has been my mother. Andrees! For Maria's sake!" She held out her hands to him.

Then he looked at her for the first time since she had come to Flackelholm, and he saw the likeness between her and Maria. He had never seen her cry — she did not easily cry — but now in her great anguish she was like her sister. The idea was like a gentle hand passing over his face so that the furrows smoothed themselves away; its expression softened, and his eyes grew gentler and quieter.

"Come with me," he said, "and let us talk."

They went slowly along the top of the dunes, in the soft sand and the grass blowing in the wind, with the sea-gulls whirring round them; she wept now and then, she spoke with the gentlest sympathy in her voice, her eyes were glowing and warm, she took his hand softly, and she won him over with all the natural gifts which are given to a true woman.

"How did it all come about, Andrees?"

"I was wicked! Ah, no! I was something less! I was a weak woman, I, Andrees Strandiger!"

"No, Andrees! You were only like a fish caught in the net and bewildered, and, when you struggled, you drew the meshes closer. You were too straightforward, Andrees, too loyal, and too stubborn. When you went into the world, you fell at once into the hands of those people. You were young and inexperienced, and you saw the world as they taught you to see it. You went with them, and you believed what they told you — that they were taking you along a splendid road. You went their road for years, at first not understanding and carried away; then you were sobered down, you understood and you were disgusted with many things, but you kept to them obstinately because you had given them so many years. You *would* not confess that you had been wrong. Then you saw your home again. It looked upon you and seized you, and drew you to its breast. You saw well enough what a mislead-

ing, dreary road you had been following, but you *would* not confess that you had been wrong! Andrees Strandiger wrong?"

"What good is it to tell me this? Keep to facts! My home betrayed, my mother deceived, the people without food and house, and Maria in her grave. Think of that! Can you do it? Imagine it on *your* soul, and then think if you could look any one in the face. There was a proud Andrees Strandiger once. He has been torn in pieces, I tell you; torn in pieces! Shattered like a pane of glass that is struck by a clenched hand! Can you make it whole again? Put it together? Madness! Away with it to the rubbish heap!"

"You are right, Andrees. The old life is done with. But you must say now, 'I will build up a new one!'"

"On this horrible heap of ruins? I have no courage, I tell you. Away with the fellow! Away with him from the light!"

"Andrees! If you would only try to build up a new life, simple and laborious and true! Perhaps one day, when you were bending down and working, suspecting nothing, you would find courage and strength again; then you would go up to the ruins and take a burnt beam here and gather the stones together there — Andrees, perhaps you could clear it all away."

"Don't talk of it! What good is it? You can't get to the heart. You might with a knife, but not with words. Don't you see? There is the pile! Maria's misery! Eschenwinkel in wretchedness! My mother's grief! That newly made grave! There is the Strandigerhof, mine, and not mine. I have lost it, wagered it like a boy in the playground. And all that has not been done by anybody — any Hans or Kunz, but by Andrees Strandiger. The fine, clever, Andrees Strandiger! Madness! Go away!"

"Yes," she said, with sparkling eyes, "that is your sin! God has shaken you till your very brain is overturned, and you — you stand there and ask, 'What will people say? What has become of the proud Andrees Strandiger?' You — you ought to ask Him who has struck you, 'What shall I do, Lord?'"

"What use is that?"

"What can you mean? If He will" — she seemed to fling something away from her — "then everything may be clear,

no trace of the ruins left, and you can begin even to-day to build a new house on that very place, on clear ground."

He shook his head and looked gloomily into the mist, his dejection expressed in his face.

"I have no trust, no faith."

"You want to try and understand God and the world and your own life by brooding over them, and I tell you, you can only get to know them by faith and work. Leave the ruins alone, and don't look into the mist, but take your axe and build yourself a new house from the wood which lies on the shore all round Flackelholm. In the whole Bible I love nothing better than the place where He says that whoever does God's will in faith will gain wisdom and happiness."

They stood still and looked over the wide shore from which the mist was rising. The sun rose slowly over the vast plain — the great expanse of vapour. It seized the clouds with its white strong hands, and gathered all the mist into its warm arms, so that it vanished in clear air. Its rays glided over the white raging surf, the water sprang up thundering, thousands of waves leapt up in gladness, flung showers of gleaming white pearls high into the air, and greeted the sun. In the hollows of the waves its rays cast a metallic green-blue light, the flocks of sea-gulls were flying swiftly, their wings rustling, turning with the speed of lightning, and the light seemed to shoot its rays above them and strike them all, not missing one; the countless wings gleamed like silver. Who is so glorious an archer as the sun?

With clear, wide eyes the sun looked over the sea where the tall proud ships were sailing, and looked at the churches which surrounded the distant shores of the great bay. Smiling and jesting it poured showers of tender radiance round the grey old walls of the lighthouse, its rival at night; it smiled kindly on the drake and the duck that were swimming close together, with their necks drawn proudly back, over the crests of the waves.

Those who have not seen your sea, O land of my home, do not know you. They do not know your greatness. It is only the man who has wandered through your woods and over your heaths, and gazed on your seas, who is your lover and whom you take to your heart; he sees the glory of your eyes and the splendour of your body and your breath. But away

there on the waves, with the fresh wind blowing round, there I can behold you fully, from your white feet to your dark hair, in your heavy robe of changing, flowing, rustling waves, with the white edge of surf. It was there where you said, Make a song about me! — Who could sing a song worthy of you, O beautiful, proud land, of you and of Him who watches over you!

They looked with quiet eyes at the rising splendour. When the sun reigned alone, over the sky and land and sea, Ingeborg looked at him.

“ Will you begin, Andrees? ”

He drew a deep breath. “ I will try to do what you have said, and I thank you. Stay a few days more with me.”

“ And then I will go to your mother.”

A few days later Ingeborg went along the dunes with little Fritz, who was always running after her; it was a beautiful warm spring day and evening was at hand. She carried a small basket; it was full of sea-gull’s eggs, which she had been collecting for supper. They were small, spotted eggs, nearly fifty of them. At that period they found about as many every day. Every few steps they lay in the warm sand, in a roughly made hollow, scarcely hidden by the thin grass of the shore. The gulls followed them as they went, flying to and fro, and screaming. When they had searched the row of dunes the boy turned to the shore. The fresh foaming waves, rising one above another, and rushing in long lines to the land, filled the child with eagerness.

“ Let us go in, Ingeborg! ”

She allowed herself to be enticed. They went over the firm flat shore down to the surf which spread for miles on either side as far as the eye could see. The waves made a wall the height of a man, crowned with foam, moving restlessly, rising and falling. Thousands of blue waves towered up and flung their white crowns on the shore at the land’s feet. Fine white sand blew like a snow-storm, and beyond the waves it built the white dunes higher every day, working six hours day and night, and in the shelter of the dunes the green land had grown and the block huts been built.

The two went down over the even, grey surface, absorbed in the sight before them, and not without fear; for it seemed as if the sea were much taller than they, as if it were running

to meet them and they could not escape. Ingeborg smiled at herself and wrinkled her white brow; little Fritz often looked at her and often glanced back at the dunes. When he looked at the surf he whistled and waved his arm and went with long steps over the wind-blown sand. Then they stood close by the surf.

How it gleamed and dashed and leapt up and fell in foam. Ten thousand riders on foaming horses in five long ranks they stormed forward and dashed themselves to pieces on the wall of the shore.

With her hand above her eyes Ingeborg looked long into the distance, but the boy, in his childish way, heeded only what was close at hand. Before the surf the water made a quiet, smooth pond, traversed by long ripples, and he went barefoot into that. And suddenly he wanted to bathe and asked to be undressed.

Then she knelt down and undressed him and stood by while he went happily into the clear water, first sitting and then lying, rolling and stretching himself. At last he sprang to her, caught her in his arms and asked her to come in the water too. She smiled and shook her head, but he went on beseeching till she took off her shoes and stockings and held up her skirt and waded near him.

They went on playing; the boy was proud of holding the beautiful girl's hand and ventured farther; in the eagerness of their happy play she held her dress still higher; suddenly a little wave stretched out its hand and snatched her shoe, laughed lightly and flung the shoe over its head to another wave, reached out again and seized the stocking, tossed it far away, and snatched and carried off and snatched and laughed till everything was gone.

Then Ingeborg turned round and saw what had happened and, since she thought she heard laughter, she threatened the sea.

Andrees Strandiger stood some little distance off and said: "I couldn't help it."

She took the boy's head in her hands and asked: "What shall we do now, Fritz?"

"Run home like this," he said cheerfully. There was nothing else to be done.

They went together across the shore in the direction of the

hut. They could see it in the distance showing over the dunes with its beams and its flagstaff; Ingeborg glanced at Andrees every now and then, but she could not see the expression of his face. In the last few weeks he had touched no razor, and a dark beard had grown round his lips and hid the outline of his face.

"What is the matter?" said Ingeborg. "Do you feel sad?"

"Antje has come," he said, "and brought a letter from Heim."

"What does the dear good fellow say?"

"Some good news and some bad."

"Tell me the bad first."

"Six families from Eschenwinkel, thirty people in all, are going to emigrate to America next week."

They were both silent and went on quietly.

"You must get over that too, Andrees."

"It is I who am driving them away from home."

She laid her hand on his arm. "I am your comrade, Andrees, and always will be; you have Heim and Reimer too. We will always be true to you."

"I never thought they would go away, but what can they do? They were not wanted. Polish men and women are working on the fields of the Strandigerhof."

"You could not have kept them, Andrees; it is an impulse in the people. They have relatives there; one attracts the other. Though it seems a sad thing now—who knows?—it may be a good thing for them and their children."

"But this is their home and it is a strange land there. And the strength of the nation pours away as if from an open vein; what comes in its place is foreign blood, of less value, and my hand has assisted in such an exchange."

"There are still many left, Andrees, whom you can help. And what is Heim's good news?"

"He is engaged to Eva Walt. He writes in the highest spirits and is hardly intelligible. He met her on the heath when he was a boy and afterwards in Heidelberg. How can that be possible? He writes quite foolishly."

They were both silent for a space.

"Do you think, Andrees, they will be happy?"

"I believe so. She has something so practical and strong

about her, and I think she will be a true comrade; that is the main thing."

They both remembered how Ingeborg had said "I am your comrade," and they were silent again.

On the clean, firm surface they were crossing, there lay ridges in pretty curved lines made by the waves of the high tide. Little Fritz, who had gone barefoot all his life till recently, stepped boldly over the uneven surface, but Ingeborg could no longer bear the pain. It brought tears to her eyes, and after awhile she had to beg that they might stand still for a few minutes. Even when she stood still, however, she felt the pain severely. She begged them to go on in front.

"He can carry you," said Fritz.

"Let me, Ingeborg. Maria is dead; I will take care of you in her place. You do so much for me."

She stood still without moving.

Then he bent and lifted her up. "I will hold you in honour, my true comrade."

When he put her down on the slope of the dunes, she said —

"Shall I go to your mother now?"

Once again he begged her: "Stay a few days more."

It was in this way she helped him to bear the present, and to look towards the future without dread.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was a sad sight.

The Polish workmen went in a long train across the fields of the Strandigerhof and took their places among the crops, hoeing up weeds with the overseer by them. At times the sound of his hoarse foreign voice was carried as far as the walls of Eschenwinkel, or to the meadow where Heim Heiderieter was following the plough, turning up the fallow for the second time. The women in Eschenwinkel shook their heads, and spoke of the strange, hard time, and the foreign country where they were going, and Heim Heiderieter, in spite of all his reasons for happiness, looked melancholy.

In the evening the Eschenwinklers sat on the slope of the hill in the heather, both men and women; their children were playing by the Wehl. Then the foreigners came, thirty or forty of them, chattering along the road like a flock of geese, they looked neither to the right nor to the left, they had drawn their red kerchiefs over their eyes and only cast the shyest of glances at the people of the country whom they were driving away from house and home.

It was strange to see how the little Eschenwinklers, who sat by the Wehl, made fun of them; and Heinrich Schütt, the only one who had read an Indian story, said that in America he would catch people like that with a lasso and make them work on his fields. The women on the slope of the hill let their knitting fall, and the men bit reflectively at their pipes; they let the band pass quietly, without making any remarks, but with watchful eyes. Afterwards they talked for some time in general terms about the fact that they made more claims on life than the people who had just vanished behind the elms of the Strandigerhof; they, who were Germans, would not work in herds under the overseer, and their difficulty lay in this, that they had no land, absolutely no land of their own. The people in the country round confessed that

the labourer who had a little land was the most zealous and the best, but the old labouring class was disappearing by degrees, and a poorer kind of people were coming into their deserted dwellings, and they themselves must obtain in another country what their own refused them — land.

They discussed these things in a simple, tranquil way, without bitterness or anger.

Ah, Probislav! Springer of the Wodanshill! They did not let you live tranquilly in the huts that did not belong to you and on land which was not yours. German fists and Saxon axes were too much for you. But that was a different age, Probislav!

Schütt always carried a brandy-bottle in his pocket, and only when he was there were there any harsh or bitter words; he pronounced scornfully the sacred word home, and mocked at the fatherland and dragged the Kaiser's name in the dust.

But no one else said such things — only Peter Schütt, grandson of Thoms Schütt, the drunkard.

Sometimes Heim Heiderieter came down the hill and Eva joined the women. They received her with pleasure, for she was simple and natural, and spoke frankly of her own good and bad times, of the far-off beautiful country where she had been born, and of her first journey into Holstein. Heim had a great map of the United States on his knee, and there was a confusion of men and smoke all round him and over him; they believed he knew every imaginable place upon it, and questions were put to him which might have earned him the fellowship of the Geographical Society if he could have answered them.

The widow Thiel, in her leather slippers, sat on a tuft of heather and explained to the women for the twentieth time why she would not go to America.

"First of all there is the water, children! I shudder when I think of it! And then there is my pension for Heinrich! Shall I leave the land he died for? And then there is Thiel's grave and the children's graves. Five children, Eva! Have you seen them? Each has a little wooden cross. Telsche Spieker says she would keep them all neat, and she would do it too if she promised; but when I think of it, it seems as if they would rather I did it myself."

That was what she said and the others tried to persuade

her. "It would be such a pleasure to you, Thielsche, to see your grandchildren."

Then she spoke of her grandchildren. "There are sixteen of them, Eva! Two come every year. I have four daughters there, Eva."

And suddenly she grew quite excited and raised her voice. "If I don't look after Pellwormer he will turn foolish and go to America in his old age. The old creature spends the whole evening sitting before his hymn-book and singing number 438."

Telsche Spieker, who sat by Eva, turned to the old woman. "You mustn't say that, Thielsche. Pellwormer does not think of emigrating himself, but he thinks of those who are going away."

"Leave Pellwormer alone, he is one of Maria Landt's sort!"

"Maria Landt!"

"Yes! She in the churchyard."

"It has made Franz Strandiger more serious."

"Boy, bring me the hymn-book; it's in the box. Don't trap your fingers."

"438." Heim read aloud the old hymn for travellers.

"Do you see, Pellwormer is thinking of us?"

There was a silence for awhile.

Then again a man came to Heim; he drew the tickets, carefully wrapped in paper, from his waistcoat pocket, and he wanted Heim, as the linguist of the party, to translate what was on them. They took in the sense of the words with astonishment and satisfaction.

The others talked all at the same time. They discussed how much of their furniture was worth taking; of the ham in the chimney which they meant to take; about their relatives' circumstances and their own hopes. They went on in that way till sunset.

If any one with keen ears had listened to them he would have been able to hear all the time the same word, "Land! Land!" Yes! the word was often spoken in those quiet May days on the slope of the heath, just south of the Heidehof.

Then the sun set over the dyke. It gilded sea and land and shed a warm light in the eyes of the people sitting in the heather. They all looked towards it; then they separated.

A month later they would be standing one here and the other there at farm doors, and the sun would be setting over the wavelike hills of Iowa, the same and yet not the same.

Two people never came on the heath — Hinnerk Elsen and Anna Witt. Anna Witt sat in the low room, stitching the whole day long at the clothes she was going to take with her; for she was going to America, she alone among the Witts, a sad traveller, worn with fretting. Hinnerk Elsen did not trouble about her; he had said briefly that she would not do for him. He had left the Strandigerhof at the same time she did, and worked two hours' distance at road-making; he passed her window occasionally, on his way to the widow Thiel, who had done his washing for years. When she saw him going past, proudly and stiffly, his eyes fixed straight before him, her head sunk lower till it touched the table, and her body quivered with grief and tears.

Sunday was the day fixed for the departure, and that morning the little church was full; people knew that the emigrants would go to communion. They all knew, too, that Pastor Frisius would give a special sermon. It was his custom to discuss everything important which happened in the parish by the light of God's word.

People had heard, however, that he had been ill for some days. After the service he had held over Maria's coffin he had been unable to go home from the churchyard without assistance, and towards evening he was in high fever. Since then he had been ill and unable to leave his room; his eyes were sad and desolate, he walked like an old man, and was always buried in deep and apparently sad thoughts. Every evening the fever returned and troubled him till after midnight.

Pellwormer, who sometimes took the collection, came from the vicarage, and went down the path announcing right and left that the pastor was ill, but would come and speak from the altar to the emigrants, and after that there would be communion.

Immediately afterwards Frisius entered, weary and pale, and after a short service when the hymn for travellers had been sung, he spoke from the altar to the emigrants; they and their wives and families sat in the first three pews of the middle row; there were thirty-four in all, for four had joined from the village. They had all come, even Schütt's family.

His wife sat there, bent down and exhausted from weeping, and the children seemed overawed; he himself was not there. That morning he had mocked and cursed. "I am getting rid of the old God and the old home like a worn-out coat, and buying something new; one can get cheaper ones there." The Dwengers would gladly have gone too, but no tickets had come for them; they had, however, hired a house in the village not far from the churchyard. It is their own now; it serves as the lodge of the Good Templars and Christoph Dwenger has been president of the order for some time. Early that day Reimer Witt had come from Flackelholm and taken a letter to Heim. He was sitting in the church now and going to stand with his daughter at the altar for the last time. She was sitting in the women's pew by Telsche Spieker, worn out with crying and almost in despair.

The widow Thiel sat wrapped in her thick black shawl, puffing and breathing heavily, the tears running over her plump cheeks. At the last moment she had decided to go with them. Now the most different emotions struggled for mastery in her: homesickness and longing for her American grandchildren and the thought of the grave at Metz; she would have been torn in pieces by emotions so many and so diverse if she had not been very strong both in body and in mind. After she had asked Heim Heiderieter's advice if it were possible, she had decided to set out on the journey in the leather slippers which Schuster Ketel had made for her. Moreover a letter from Iowa had informed her that her daughter Therese, after living six years in California, had set out the previous summer for Australia. This news completed her bewilderment, for she had never heard the word Australia, and though Heim held up a round peat basket to serve as a globe, he could not make her understand where the strange country lay.

Among the emigrants sat their relatives and friends from the village, including Pellwormer, who wore a black silk necktie and a long coat; this coat had narrow sleeves, slashed near the cuff, and had been in fashion forty years ago. Quite in the background, under the organ, sat Hinnerk Elsen, wearing a black coat and white collar, very upright and neat. Only from time to time he bent sideways to look across at Anna Witt, and raised his eyebrows and looked very serious.

In the Heiderieter's pew, behind the oaken door with its little Gothic turret, and under Heiderieter's epitaph, sat Heim, and beside him Eva Walt in a black woollen dress, with a myrtle wreath in her dark hair. The emigrants had said to him: "Get married, Heim, before we go."

Heim had said to Eva: "Do you know — we must be married on the Sunday they leave. What do you say to that?"

She was holding the door and she did not turn round, but said in her quick way —

"As you wish, sir."

He sprang after her. "I have been wondering where the emigrants can dine on Sunday."

"With us in the threshing-room: boiled puddings and bacon. I have planned it all out and arranged it."

He had looked at her in astonishment, with wide eyes, then, as happy as a boy, he had stumbled down the hill with his long legs and invited them all to dinner on Sunday.

Pastor Frisius stood at the altar and spoke of house and hearth, of baptisms and bridals and graves, of Ibstedt and Gravelotte, of spades and trenches, of the brown heath and the green dyke and the dark Wehl between them, of sweat and horny hands. He told those who were grown up that they *could* not forget their home, and those who were young that they *ought* not to forget it. He spoke of Him who is Lord of the sea itself and of all beyond it, and of Iowa too; to whom all men belong and who beholds His wondering children. He spoke of journeys: how all men sought for pearls; when they were children in the sands, in their young days in the air, when they were of man's estate on the earth and, last of all, under the earth. But we are sent out to seek for one pearl precious above all others, one pearl worthy of all honour, pure as the eye of God, and sweet as the eye of a mother and bright as the sun. And that pearl is the kingdom of heaven. If the desire for land drives you away from home, do not forget the eternal land. Then he spoke in brief sentences of the value and the beauty and the power of Christianity. He spoke simply and plainly, with the forcible expressions and ideas that his hearers knew well. If a stranger had been present in the church he would have said: "These people have lived like that. That has been their work. That has been their love and their hope."

Afterwards they went to the altar, Heim and Eva last. When Pastor Frisius had joined their hands he could hardly keep his feet. Leaning on Pellwormer's arms he went across the churchyard to his quiet house.

The threshing-floor was decorated with birch boughs. Heim stood there and called the men to his side and told them —

“I am to give you good wishes from Andrees Strandiger, and so that you may see he is sorry for what has happened on the Strandigerhof, he sends five hundred marks to every man and wife, and two hundred to each single person. For you as well, Anna. Don't cry, child! Put it away! He begs you not to think hardly of him.”

They all nodded, spoke kindly and sent good wishes to him; they said too that they would write to him.

Afterwards they sat round the long table which extended from one end of the threshing-floor to the other, Heim and Eva at the head, Reimer Witt on the right, Haller on the left, Pellwormer next to him, and then the others — parents and children mingled together. Telsche Spieker ran to and fro, carrying food and pouring out the beer from the barrel. When they had taken a few mouthfuls they let their right hands lie idle, still holding the forks, and took up their beer-glasses.

The rest of the Eschenwinklers and their relatives in the village who were remaining at home, stood on the road or in the wide-opened door or came in to the diners and placed themselves behind their chairs, talking over various things. Old Frau Gruhl from the Sandway came through the village for the last time that day; she walked, leaning on her stick, and brought a letter and her love for her son in Davenport. The letter and the love were given in due course, but when her son read the letter she was already in her grave.

The sun shone in at the threshing-floor warmly and brightly, and they often looked out. There in the distance the sea was gleaming. “To-morrow night we shall be on your waves.”

No one heard a loud laugh or a loudly spoken word, and there was no speech-making. Heim stood up and raised his glass, and said with a white face: “God be with you,” and clinked it and sat down. Schoolmaster Haller rose after him, intending to make a speech, but could only say: “You have nearly all of you been in my school and felt my cane.” He

could get no further, but he raised his hand menacingly, so they understood him. His mouth quivered, and his eyes were full of tears. If any one else tried to say a word to his neighbour he cleared his throat and coughed. They all felt as if they were speaking in a strange language and with a foreign accent; they looked at each other with pale faces, and each knew what the rest were feeling. They sat on the Heidehill, south of Heim's house, and looked for the last time over the land, and the shore, and the sea. Once again their home seemed to fling itself on their breasts, caress and kiss them, and it was hard for them to thrust it off and say, "We are going away, and shall never return." Then they all went through the village to the station. Old Pellwormer walked among the children, and young Rohde by his father. His mother had stayed at home.

"Give our love to your brothers and sisters!" said the old man.

"Father, you will be alone now."

"Well, that is the way of the world."

"Father, what will you do in the evenings? The newspaper only comes twice a week. You will smoke your pipe and mother will knit, but what will you talk of? And whom will my mother knit for?"

"We shall become quieter than ever. Your mother has grown quieter every time one of you went away. We lost the first two; then Heinrich went away when he was sixteen, then the two girls, and Jürgen next, and now you are going."

"Perhaps you will follow me!"

The old man shook his head. "Your mother could not leave the graves and the village. She was born here."

The youth felt a lump in his throat. "Have you noticed mother's hair is quite grey?"

"Yes, didn't you? She is not strong. She was so ill when you were born."

"It was only to-day I noticed her grey hair. If only I knew what you would do in the evenings?"

"Don't worry about it."

"When you are so quiet and mother is looking on the ground — for she will have nothing to knit."

They went on for awhile and came to the turn that gave them a last glimpse of the house.

"Father, I will run back a minute, and see what mother is doing."

He rushed back and in through the open door to the room, but she was not there. She was sitting in the kitchen by the red stone hearth; her hands were folded on her lap, she was bent down, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and her hair was grey.

"Mother! I will stay with you if I never get land and horses. I cannot leave you alone."

As the young fellow did not return, his father came back and found them both sitting by the hearth, and for the first time since he had outgrown his childhood, the boy had his arms round his mother.

So Wilhelm Rohde remained at home because he thought his mother would have nothing to do if he went away. He lives now south of the wood and has a few acres of Geest land which Andrees Strandiger has rented him cheaply. Every morning at daybreak he crosses the heath to work at the Strandigerhof. His father died before sixty—the dysentery he got at Metz had taken his strength—but his mother is now an old woman with white hair, and she has enough to do, for he married Bertha Witt when he was very young, and they have two children.

Schütt had taken his accordion with him and was playing it cheerfully in the station and singing. No one liked the tune, however, and Heim took the thing away, and gave it to some one else and said—

"Play 'Schleswig-Holstein, by the sea.' "

They listened gladly to that. The fourth verse was sung by those who were remaining at home.

"God gives strength e'en to the weakest,  
If in love and trust they come;  
Fear not, and thy bark will struggle  
Through the tempest safely home."

The emigrants bent their heads and felt as if it were all meant specially for them. Then the train came.

The saddest farewell of all was Anna Witt's; she could not tear herself from her father. At last the weeping girl was seized by Schütt and dragged into the coach; Schütt was drunk and, laughing loudly, excused himself by saying that one ought to drink to the so-called "home." At that moment Hinnerk

Elsen came up the platform in some excitement and saw what was going on. The train started; the windows were full of people waving their hands with tears in their eyes. Nothing was to be seen of Anna Witt.

That evening everything was quiet in Eschenwinkel and on the heath. They were all sitting in their houses and talking over the great event of the day.

Heim and Eva went across the heath, their faces serious but happy. Their bridal day had been graver than they had thought it would be. They were deeply moved by the silent grief which they had seen in so many faces usually so calm. It was the peace covering the quiet heath which brought them back to the happy present and to their own affairs.

"In summer you must work outside, Heim, the whole day, very busily. In the evening you can write a little now and then."

"Oh! —"

"But in winter the man and I can manage everything. Then you will be able to write."

"As long as the fit lasts."

She shook his arm. "Don't interrupt me! You must write something worth having; not just a careless poem! Something really serious. Something that one can really take hold of. You must write about sin and sorrow, and the home and the fatherland, and true love and honest work. You must write something really German and simple, like Reuter and Freytag have written; something for the 'whole nation, which scholars will like to read, and simple people as well.'

He had been about to interrupt her again, but when she shook his arm a second time he contented himself with muttering —

"She is going to manage the Heidehof vigorously."

"You have seen what has happened to-day," she continued. "This farewell to the home, that is a true German picture. Millions of Germans have left home like that."

"You forget completely that this is our wedding day!"

"But listen, Heim! Perhaps you could get material first from the history of the country."

"A historical novel?"

"Yes, yes."

"I can't even read one, much less write it."

"You like to read Freytag and Ekkehardt?"

"I like best of all to read in your eyes! Come here. How lovely you are! Put your arm round me just for once."

"Not here, Heim."

"You have never done it yet!"

"Afterwards, at home, Heim."

"Come! We will go home. It is sunset."

She went very slowly, holding his arm to keep him back.

"The air is so pure and lovely, and the sky is so blue. The potatoes are coming on well; we must hoe them up next week. Tell me how much can we grow on a hectare when the year is fairly good?"

"It is good, light soil; a hundred and fifty barrels."

"And how much do you get a barrel?"

"About three marks fifty."

"That makes so much?"

"But the farmer, my dear girl, has to take three things into account!"

"What things?"

"Well, do you see! First, if what he sows comes up."

"They are coming up!"

"Then, if it can be gathered in?"

"Well!"

"And at last, when he has gathered it, if he can get anything for it. Do you see, Eva, child? A man with a regular income only reckons once. He just takes so much as if he cut it off with a pair of scissors. You ought to have married some one of that kind."

"A young gentleman; a bored expression, a dressing-gown — he watches when the girl cleans the room — even does it himself — horrible!"

"Well I never! What an idea! You ought to have married an official. Then his wife would get her money on the first of every month, exactly at half-past eleven! There, Betty! The husband would take his pocket-money and they would arrange it; so nicely!"

"No! I could not bear an official. So many drink beer every day, and that is horrible; they grow stupider and stupider, Heim! Others are always reading the newspaper! What good are such husbands to their wives? Even at night

in their dreams they can think of nothing but documents, schools and walks, speeches and their table at the club. Many of them grow queer when they get old, and the best of them are the most likely to do it.

“The farmer — don’t go so quickly, Heim — the farmer is the really complete man: that is, he *can* be. He has the best chance. Do you see, he must have learnt something and yet he must keep simple. He must take hold of the spade himself, and he must be proud of going over the land with his plough and his bag of seed. He respects his wife because she has to look after and manage all the house and understands that. The man manages outside and she inside.”

“We are man and wife! How lovely you look! Come! Let us go home!”

“The farmer’s wife — a little longer, Heim; it is still quite light — the farmer’s wife has her husband always near, but still he has his work and so he isn’t a worry, as you are, Heim, with your arm. Come, take your hand away. He doesn’t get in the way and has no time to make long speeches. And at evening they sit together before the door, both tired, and they don’t think of society and things like that. They look at the sunset and they are happy.”

“And then they go to sleep! Come, Eva!”

“We will go a little way on the heath, Heim.”

“No, Eva! Turn round, Eva Heiderieter! Your home is there!”

“Must we go home?” She looked sideways across the heath and there was an anxious expression in her face. Suddenly she turned to him, put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

Then she went home on his arm, slowly and silently.

As they got over the wall Hinnerk Elsen came up the garden to them with vigorous steps, his cold pipe in his mouth and without a cap.

“What do you think, Heim?” he said in great excitement. “I have just been to see Telsche Spieker; Reimer has gone back to Flackelholm. And Telsche Spieker has given me such a time, she has made my hair stand on end! She says that I didn’t look after Anna. She says that I have been stupid and careless. I!” And he struck his fist against his breast. “You know, she can be rude and yet nice at the same

time! You know her! But this time she was only rude; she struck on the table before me! She says I pretended to be a lover, but I behaved like a grandfather. And afterwards that cracked Pellwormer came and made it worse than ever! She stormed and he sang. He couldn't speak a single word; he was like a deaf mute, but he could sing! And it was always the same tune: 'Do you know how many stars there are?' I wonder my coat kept whole; they have torn my reputation in bits. What do you say?"

"Tell me, Hinnerk, why did you go to Telsche? It is a long time since you've been near Reimer's house."

"I? Well, I wanted to know something about her — how she felt —"

"Well! I thank Heaven I am not like other people! The good, respectable Hinnerk Elsen asking about such people as Anna!"

"No, Heim! Do you know — it's stupid, Heim! But I am so sorry for her!"

He glanced at Eva with eyes which showed a bad conscience. She looked at him gravely.

"I won't strike the table before you, Hinnerk; but I do beg of you — think if you have been wanting in any way. If you have, then make up for it as far as possible."

"Yes — yes — there's real sense in what you say! I think so too; it must all be made right."

"Hinnerk, that would give us such pleasure," said Heim, and put his arm round Eva. "The little one is our neighbour's child. Forget what has happened, boy."

"Well then, good evening. It was a good thing I came to you. Good evening again."

He waved his pipe in farewell.

"Will you have a light, Hinnerk?"

"I have one."

An hour later some one knocked at a house in the village, on the man servant's window. Wilhelm Rohde, who was still awake in bed, sprang up and opened the window.

Hinnerk Elsen stood outside in the darkness.

"See here, Wilhelm — I was just passing — I may come back on Saturday, but perhaps not at all. I want to know

what it says on your ticket. Have you any kind of passport? I may be going to America."

"It is quite simple, for you have not been a soldier. There are no difficulties then. Wait a minute!"

A moment after he was by the window again with some papers in his hand. "You can't read them," he said. "Take them with you; I don't want them."

"Did you pay anything for them?"

"No."

Hinnerk Elsen vanished in the night.

Next morning thick mist covered the harbour at Hamburg, so thick that it hid even the yards of the ships; below was the grey water, above the grey mist, and between them the vague, dark outlines of the hulls. The first activity of the morning had begun; from a distant wharf on the opposite bank there sounded the rolling of a heavy wagon, interrupted now and again; a sail was run up; immediately after a quiet voice seemed to emerge from the mist and water; shuffling steps went along the row of houses.

There stood the old emigrant inn, bent and ancient and sad-eyed, looking as if bowed with grief—or like an old procress standing by the way and bartering with men. The young day blinked sleepily on the blind panes and could not recognize Anna Witt; she was the first to come down-stairs, and she was crouching on the floor searching among her things.

She looked and rummaged, but all she really wanted was solitude. The others were stirring in the bedroom above; they were to go on board in an hour. Then she placed herself and her bundle on a wooden chair, gazed round the desolate room, and, bowing her head on her hands, burst into tears.

There was a heavy step outside, the door opened, a man stood there and peered into the room. When he saw the figure by the bundle and heard the sobbing he went in.

She thought it was the host, and looked up. She recognized Elsen, and gazed at him with eyes full of anguish.

"Oh, come!" he said in a constrained voice. "Everything will be all right. We can be married there."

She shook her head despairingly, staring at him all the time.

"What more do you want?" he asked.

"You — must tell me."

"What? — that it is my fault?"

"Hinnerk!" she screamed — "No! no! you must tell me you love me still."

"Of course! Or I should not have come so far. Come here — be quite still!"

After awhile, when she was a little quieter, he said, "I have a miserably bad conscience."

"Why, Hinnerk?"

"Because I was rude to Telsche Spieker and to Pellwormer with his shining stars, and because I have Wilhelm Rohde's ticket."

She hung her head.

He drew out his pipe, stepped up to the table and said, "Is there no light in this miserable place?"

Then he found one and sat down by her, and, as the match blazed up, he saw her pale, wretched face.

"Well," he said again. "Everything will come all right. Heim's Eva spoke like a minister. One ought to make up for it, she said. But that's a difficult matter; if you sweep your conscience clean in one corner you only seem to raise a worse dust than ever in all the others. I will open the window."

He got up and looked out contentedly at the dawning day. After awhile he turned round. "I am only sorry that the two thousand marks are not complete."

Anna Witt knelt by her bundle and said, "I have two hundred, Hinnerk, which Heim gave me from Andrees."

## CHAPTER V.

"WELL!" said Heim, ten weeks later, "everything is hoed and weeded; we can do no more work now, and the time for waiting has come. Hallo, Frau Eva! We will put in the horses and go to Flackelholm!"

She nodded. "I have been wanting to go a long time, though I am afraid of the Watt. I should like to see Ingeborg again."

"She is the best of all — next to you!"

"Do you think she will marry Andrees?"

"Be quiet! Don't mention it; don't speak of it! There is no rose yet on Maria's grave."

"I was there yesterday, and there are buds."

"Let well alone."

"Have you any commissions for Andrees?"

"Only a letter from the pastor. He sent it to me to-day when I was coming from the peat moss; they say he is very feeble."

"Poor fellow! He won't last much longer. What else have you to do?"

"Nothing. I will introduce you as my wife."

"And yourself as a husband!"

"And then I will ask if he can help the rest of the Eschenwinklers. They are going an hour and a half's walk away to get work on the Diekskooger 'foreland.' It is a wretched business."

"I wonder how everything will turn out. I feel very unhappy about it. Ingeborg with Andrees on Flackelholm; that is so sad, so unwise! And Franz at the Strandigerhof. And Andrees's mother in that silent room — Franz visits her every day for hours, Heim."

"The main thing is that Andrees should get courage and Ingeborg become his wife."

"You seem to be very happy."

"Don't be conceited."

He leaned back in his chair and stretched himself. "I have a very good conscience," he said. "I have worked hard for ten weeks. And just in the honeymoon. Other people go on their wedding tour."

"You have spent your honeymoon in the potato-field. Do you think we shall get on?"

"If I keep as good and sensible."

"Don't trouble about that, my love, that is my affair."

She passed her hand over the table-cloth, her wedding-ring shining on it, signalled to him with her mischievous, dark eyes, and nodded.

He laughed. "You have self-confidence."

"That comes with responsibility."

He stretched his long arm across the table. "Get away," he cried.

And as she looked at him laughingly, with her rounded arm laid on the table, he sprang up.

Then she ran quickly out of the room, for she knew that if he caught her she would not soon get loose again.

At midday the tide went down, and they set out over the Watt with Reimer Witt. They crossed under the most favourable circumstances, with swift, strong horses, bright, clear weather, and a light wind, but the young wife felt a weight on her heart, and she was very silent when they saw at last the lovely country before them. It lay there like a green leaf on a pond, as bright as a mirror, for the tide was coming in already and the whole of the Watt glittered with sunlit water.

Ingeborg came from the hut to meet them. Eva saw her and thought, "How grave and beautiful she has grown."

Her heavy, fair hair was twisted on the nape of her neck in simple plaits, she wore a dress of some soft black woollen material, a short skirt, and low shoes of black leather. Her face was full enough, but her eyes were sunken and had something in them sad and brooding. Those bright arrow-like glances of hers no longer met the eyes of others, but turned shyly here and there, and then, as if they gave up a vain attempt, sank bow and arrows to the ground at once.

Heim went across the dunes to meet Andrees, who was approaching over the shore; Antje and Reimer had gone out to catch some crabs for supper in the Dieksander Priel.

Then Ingeborg seized Eva's hand and said: "Come in the hut with me. It is still so warm. When evening comes we can look round the island."

As they were entering the hut, Ingeborg said: "Heim has been my friend from childhood; I should like to be friends with you. May I say thou?"

Eva sat on the chair which stood by the table, and looked up at Ingeborg kindly, with dark, pleading eyes; her soft lips parted a little, as if they were saying, "Now tell me what troubles you?"

Ingeborg looked round again through the poor little room, then her tall figure slipped down till she was on her knees, and she laid her hands on Eva's lap.

"I am so glad," she said softly, "that you have come. I have been here such a long time. I sleep here and Antje there, and the men stay in the block hut. I never hear a woman's voice, except Antje's, and she speaks so monotonously, often wildly, and I never see any woman's face but hers, with its good, foolish eyes. I have longed so much to see a woman's face. I am so glad you have come."

"Do you know," said Eva, laying her hands on Ingeborg's shoulders, "I came on your account, for I thought you might need a kind word."

"I do; I must show my courage, and I have none; I must stay here, and yet I ought to go away. It tortures me to imagine what people will think of me. I wanted to tell you that. You are my sister." As she spoke, she hid her burning face in Eva's lap, and began to speak most intimately of Maria's death.

"Was she in her senses or not?"

"She was not," said Ingeborg, weeping. "She was ill."

"She died because she wanted to help; the light of her understanding had gone out, there was only her love left."

"Yes, Eva, that was it."

"And I think you must forget the guilt and neglect that caused it, and must help yourself and the Eschenwinklers, and even Franz if he needs help. That was Maria's wish, and it must be sacred to you. And be glad, Ingeborg, that what Maria asks from you is what God asks from all human beings: that we should help each other, and not hate."

"So I must stay here?"

"Yes, as long as he needs your help."

"You have something so assured and calm about you, my heart stops beating so wildly, and feels at rest."

"We must ask help from God, Ingeborg, and give help to men."

"I used to sing like a lark before God and men. Now I hide my face."

Eva comforted the weeping girl with her caressing voice, and stroked her with soft hands. Then she raised her from her knees and said —

"Come with me, we will go to the men."

They were both standing on the dunes. Heim was somewhat taller than Andrees, but otherwise they were very similar figures, tall, vigorous men, like those who live on the shore of the North Sea. Heim had fair hair, and Andrees dark; Heim was upright and had powerful shoulders, Andrees was somewhat thin and a little bent; he was very much changed from what he had been a year ago in the inn room at Tübingen.

Heim looked at his wife, whom he had already missed.

"Come up, here, child," he called. "You can see as far as England from here."

"Do you hear?" said Eva. "He calls me 'child'!"

"I think," said Ingeborg, "that when I was little he was fond of me. He was a great, tall boy then. We have always been friends since. Now you are the nearest to him."

Eva answered thoughtfully: "It is very strange and wonderful that I should be a happy wife here, so far from my home."

"Yes, your life has been very strange."

"But now it will be peaceful — quite peaceful. I shall soon be unable to wander any more. When winter comes — it would be lovely, Ingeborg, if you could be at the Strandigerhof this winter and visit us every day. It would be so useful to me."

"I will see, Eva. I will think of what you have confided to me." And she kissed hastily the young wife's lips.

The evening was soft and mild. They sat on the bench which stood above on the dunes and looked over the sea; evening was descending on it as sleep descends upon men who

have lain down to rest. It was still moving and thrusting its white feet against the edge of the bed — the sandy shore; but as the evening sank the surf disappeared, everything grew still, and it was night. At times, like a murmur in sleep, there sounded a rustling and rolling. In the distance, now here and now there, a white gleam shone through the night like the white in the eye of some beast of prey.

They sat by each other in silence. Eva had her arm round Ingeborg, and Heim sat next to Eva. Andrees Strandiger sat on the cask of salt which he had brought up from the shore the previous day. Antje crouched on the sand which was still warm from the sun; Reimer, who had been looking after the horses, came slowly up the dunes. There was something united and happy about them all as if it were holiday time. Antje wore a white kerchief round her brown neck, and Reimer carried in his hand his long Sunday pipe. It was the first time that the inhabitants of Flackelholm had spent the evening together.

It was true the conversation halted. Antje listened to the clinking of the horses' chains which sounded up from the green land; Reimer Witt and Andrees looked at the huge ship which was gliding along the Norderelbe quietly and slowly and proudly like a floating city. They saw the double row of gleaming lights; it went in to the left of the Neuwerker lighthouse. Heim, who had had no opportunity since midday to talk alone with Eva, tried to seize her hand which she took away again after a light pressure. Ingeborg breathed deeply and quietly with wide, thoughtful eyes. She nestled close to Eva, almost on her breast.

Then Heim bent forward and said in his lively fashion —

“Children, I will tell you all a story from the old days. Antje, pay attention. Eva, sit still. Ingeborg, prick up your ears. It was in my house, in the oak chest — and my father didn't know it, nor I either, but my wife found it — an old book with strong wooden covers and rough grey paper. Inside there was stiff but clear writing, written in the Heidehof two hundred and seventy years ago by a true Heiderieter. He signs himself 'Henni Heiderieter, cand. rev. min., aged seven-and-thirty.' Like a true Heiderieter he was never more than a candidate. He writes so himself.”

And with the ease which is peculiar to the inhabitants of the wide Wodansheath, and in the cheerful tone which seemed to surround his hearers like a soft gentle breeze, he told his tale. The human beings at his side, the sea-gulls in their nests on the sand, the still green land, and the lightly waving grasses on the shore—all seemed to listen to him. The Neuwer lighthouse looked across with its fiery eye. They all listened and were pleased with the message from the past. Only the sea growled at times in the distance, for the sea had taken a great part in the story.

“Now once again the wild, murderous North Sea has torn over the land, rushing after the houses and the flying people like a dog that has gone mad, and tears about from one flock to another, rending them in pieces. It is three hundred years since the sea so raged and stormed, devoured and swallowed up. It is hard to calculate how many centuries it is since the water leapt over the dunes and the waves wet the gable of the Heidehof. No! the Heidehof was not standing then. This country was not yet Christianized; *eo tempore* the Heiderieters were still riding their horses across the heath—a *genus hominum vagabundum*. And now I, Henni Heiderieter, have been called upon to behold such a horrid sight and *spectaculum* with my own eyes. Yes, with my own hands, which are unaccustomed to such work, I have had to mend the gable with boards, and have hung for four hours together on the sloping roof like a wet weed on the edge of a ditch, and the wild water dashed against me and stretched out its hands to me, and was not satisfied though it had devoured so many human bodies.

“The storm-bell rang terribly when the first wagons, full of women and children, came up from the March to the Sandway at four o'clock in the morning. I never saw before how much courage women could have in the midst of their anguish, and how little children could act like men. A man down below in the March—the waves are washing over his farm now—had a little boy, not more than seven years old, and he gave him the bridle in his tiny hands, for the wife would not leave her husband. The boy brought a whole wagon full of little children—fourteen little children—galloping madly by short cuts through the March, and travelled through the darkness for a whole hour and a half toward the fire we had

kindled. I can see it still, and I can hardly keep back my tears when I remember how the women pressed the children to their breasts, for they were almost frozen; and how the little seven-year-old could not loosen his arm, which he had placed round the front of the wagon, and could not get his fingers free from the reins, they were so stiff and cramped with the cold.

"Magister Johannes Jansenius, who was pastor of this church then, had a fire made in the tower; but the whole of God's house almost became a prey to the flames because the storm tore the beech logs from the iron plate on which they had been laid, and drove them on the church. Then I, Henni Heiderieter, whom the same magister has so often and so cruelly called a dreamer — see Gen. cap. 37, ver. 19 — made a great fire of birch twigs, south of the Heidehof. I burnt my black coat in doing so, the one my father had made for me, which cost an imperial dollar<sup>1</sup> and six shillings.<sup>2</sup> The tails were burnt off and it was turned into a jacket.

"Many other wagons came that night, the horses covered with white foam as if they were the waves themselves. Many people arrived on foot; tall women, with pale, set faces, often with nothing on but a grey chemise, carrying or leading their little children. They told us horrible and unspeakable things. Those who come after us will read of them, and they will sound like a nightmare, and not as if they had verily happened.

"In those two days in which the wild flood was pouring over the land were not three churches overwhelmed close by us in the March and some three hundred houses and more than a thousand men drowned? And this happened in our neighbourhood alone. The destruction on the islands and the Frisian Marches was such that it cries to heaven. It is to be hoped that men will not forget to take revenge on the wild sea. That in some more auspicious time they will start to win back what lies down there in the grey waves; churches and graves, houses and men and wide fruitful land! It is to be hoped that kings will come who will rule vigorously and fight vigorously against the North Sea!

"Before, when I looked out from our big front door at the Heidehof, I could see nothing in the March before me but

<sup>1</sup>Three shillings.    <sup>2</sup>Hamburg shillings, of very small value.

the wide green land and low dykes and three towers, and I have often thought that if I could get through my examination — concerning which I venture to say in this book *damnatum sil* — I thought it might come to pass that I should some time be a pastor there, for the livings were good. But now they are overwhelmed; the wild waters are raging still against the dunes and no one ventures up; our people are unaccustomed to the sea, which has become their neighbour now; they are afraid of it and will have to learn how to go across the Watt and catch fish and build dykes.

“A man who saved himself and his daughter Grethje, and is living here, made a light boat and went out with old Harro Harrsen, another of the survivors, over the quicksand and the Watt; but he could not find the place where his house had stood and he came back alone and deadly pale. Harro Harrsen had been drowned on the way.

“Peter Jens and his daughter have been living with us here, for all the houses are full of people and they have had the room west of the kitchen. Grethje soon took over the rule of the kitchen after she had driven away with her scolding the old woman who used to be our housekeeper. She is as tall and slender as a mast and has fair hair. If my father permits it she shall be my betrothed, for her eyes are clear and blue, and she steps vigorously, and she will suit me well as Magister Jansenius says and smiles. But I know what he thinks: that I am a dreamer and wear Joseph’s many-coloured coat — *id est*: live always in thoughts and dreams, and sit and carve wood; just now I am making the *modellum* for a chimney for his *serenissimum* the duke, who resides sometimes at the castle at Husum. She wields the broom and chopper forcibly, almost intimidatingly.

“After this *excursus*, and after I have been to see if the key of the oak chest fits properly so that she may not get to the book and see what I have written down and be angry with me — I return to my subject. On the second evening, when the water sank and grew calmer, and the last houses disappeared out there in the roaring sea, then Peter Jens’s daughter went down the dunes and dragged up all kinds of things, boards and beams, for they intended to build a house on the heath since my father had given them permission. When I saw her go I followed her, because I liked to see her as she

went into the water, so proud and tall with her short fisher's skirt. The water was foaming and covered with pieces of wreckage, and all at once I saw her lift her hands above her eyes and look out above it. The wreckage was dashed and flung wildly together, but she looked always in the same direction, where something round was floating; it seemed like a big vessel of the kind used for holding milk or like a cask with a low rim. Then suddenly she quivered all over like a spirited horse when it feels the whip. She tore off her girdle so that her garment dropped down and I had to turn my eyes away—but I remembered that I was an artist, and I had been wanting for a long time to carve a figure for the church—Eve tempting Adam to eat the apple—and I had not been able to do it because I did not know how a woman's body is formed, for the women of this country wrap themselves round the waist with thick woollen wrappings, which is not pleasant for an artist—and when I thought of that I ventured to stand and watch her. She went at once into the water and swam through all the wreckage with long strokes, now lifted up by the waves and now covered by them, and I ran down the dunes and cried out when I saw her shoulder only just escape the thrust of a driving beam. Then she seized the round vessel with both hands, and, leaning against a great beam, she was carried slowly ashore. I stood and saw her come closer and closer and saw what she had with her—and my eyes were full of astonishment and I forgot her breast, rising on the waves, and forgot the blood flowing from her shoulder.

"A little child was there, only some six or eight weeks old; it lay on its back, it had a little shirt on and was wrapped in flannels; it was wound round and round with strips of linen, and tied to a wooden canopy taken from some pulpit; it must have been driving for hours through the wild water towards the shore, and its rosy hands were closed round the iron stake which supported the dove; it was either dead or asleep.

"I sprang into the water just as I was; she had already got a firm footing and we carried the heavy cover and the child on it up the shore. Then she drew her dress over her and knelt by the child. I loosened the linen band, but she paid no attention to what I was doing but cherished and kissed and warmed the child; she tore some heather up and

rubbed its limbs till the colour came back to its little grey face, the deathly cold yielded and the child began to weep.

"Then she looked at me for the first time, *acriter et male*, and pointed to the shore and said, as if I were a servant and she *serenissima* the duchess: 'I want those beams for our hut,' then she went up the dunes carrying the child.

"That night I carved linden wood till nearly morning, with my forehead burning and my limbs trembling, for I was still cold after the water; but I had hit upon what I wanted, and when *serenissimus* the duke came through the village and saw my Eve in the church, he asked me who had been the model for my figure. I almost told him, but Grethje stood by the hearth where he was sitting and had the tongs in her hand, and her eyes sparkled. I was silent, for although she is good and gentle in other ways she has something which the Latin language names *impetus* and which in horses we call spirit.

"Soon after that I got the order for the chimney in *serenissimi* castle at Husum.

"The next day Grethje Jens would not speak to me and did not answer when I asked her: 'How is the boy whom we found yesterday in the water?' She threw her head back and went into the room, and I listened to the child's cries. For a guest she behaved in a very proud and silent and unfriendly manner. I thought she would be kind to me because I had helped her and not said a word about the salvage to any one, but she kept harsh till my father died. That happened a month after the storm. Then I waited for her one day when she was coming out of the best room, that Father Luther calls the 'Saal!' and I said: 'Do you know that the boy must be baptized?'

"For the first time she answered me and said: 'I will take him to-day to the magister. Will you come with me?' Then we went together.

"The magister said: 'He must be called Moses because he was taken out of the water, but what else? Jens?'

"She drew herself up proudly and said: 'His name is my business. He shall be called Peter after my father, and because he was stranded like wreckage is stranded he shall be

called Strandiger. He shall be called Peter Strandiger, for we know nothing of his parents and they are with God.'

"The magister looked at her. He was by no means a small man and he had often boasted to me that he was afraid of nothing; but he had not a word to say in reply and he baptized the child while she pointed to it. But I, Magister Johannes Jansenius, rejoiced at the sight of your face, *quod erat perplexum*.

"We went home in silence. Old Peter Jens stood before the door, waiting for us. As we came up he said: 'You look like a man and wife coming home from christening their first born.' This speech surprised me, for he was usually a silent man and a great dreamer.

"So I took heart and followed her in the kitchen and I said, modestly and bowing before her: 'If the Jungfrau Jens will become my wife she will always find me a respectful and serious husband.'

"She turned round, looked at me for the first time since she had saved the child from the water, and said harshly and shortly, breaking off her words like dry wood: 'I suppose I must.' But she was not kind to me as a betrothed should have been.

"After some months old Peter Jens got very ill and in his illness he talked to us — but he was half-delirious — of his last journey in the Watt when Harro Harrsen was drowned. I have put what he said into verse — not the kind of verse that is written these days in Germany, *sentimentaliter*, but *simpliciter*; only just what he said and in the same language.

"Now straight along! Straight on the way!  
Seest thou a grove or path to-day?  
Or wilt thou go to the church door?  
The bell calls to the church no more  
In the dead land.

"But house and dyke — their place is clear —  
And the wild sea is ruler here.  
For seventy years I worked and strove,  
Seventy years in the land I love,  
The lovely land.

"What seest thou there? Thine eyes are full!  
The waves play with a dead man's skull.

The dead come forth to the world again,  
And living men are lost in the main —  
The poor, poor land.

“Where are we now? Yes, there I see —  
The grassy road there — there — must be —  
See there, my word! That long green bed!  
My boy’s own work! My boy is dead —  
My handsome boy!

“Now back again! The place is found.  
The water seizes, whirls us round.  
My own proud boy! By my white hair  
I would that I were lying there  
By my dear boy.

“Across the Watt I steer to-night;  
My heart is sad, my hair is white.  
And I will wait till I hear his call,  
Then I will start for once and all  
To the lovely land.

“In the night he died.

“Since that time twenty years have passed; I have been young and am almost old now. I have been abroad and returned home again. The land which disappeared in such storm and horror is beginning to rise again from the water. People speak already of building a dyke to the north. Only just by us, where the rush of the water was greatest and the deep Wehl was torn out, the land will not grow. But Peter Strandiger, our foster son, is working down there; he has made trenches and built dams and he observes the currents very carefully. He says: ‘My parents lie out there in the Watt. I will make a beginning so that we may win the land back again. If I live to be seventy I will live on the other side of the dyke in a house of my own that I have built from wreckage, and the house shall be called the Strandigerhof.’ When he comes home at evening with his flock of sheep our son springs to meet him, the one whom Grethje has borne to me and who is our only child.

“These things and many others which are astonishing enough — but which I won’t write down for Frau Grethje always looks vexed whenever I write — I have experienced in

my earthly journey, as Luther calls it; I, Henni Heiderieter, who am *candidatus* and a carver of figures in wood and stone."

The night was very still. It covered sea and land with its blue mantle, embroidered with countless stars. Far away over Neuwerk it seemed to stir the border of the mantle from time to time as if it would lift it up, and a quick clear beam showed like a flash of lightning. The group on the dunes, on the edge of the earth, rose, looked out into the night, talked together in low tones and went back into the hut.

The next morning when Heim and Eva were going to start, Heim remembered the letter which he had brought from the vicarage. He came to Andrees, shaking his head over his own forgetfulness.

"Would you believe! I forgot I have a letter from the pastor."

Andrees opened it quickly. It contained only these words.

"If you want to see and speak to your old friend again make haste: the end is coming."

Andrees Strandiger returned with Heim and Reimer Witt stayed with the women.

Pastor Frisius lay dying. Haller and Pellwormer stood by his bed. Pellwormer shifted from one foot to the other and tried to say something, but he could not. Haller wiped the drops of sweat from the sick man's brow, and said again and again: "My dear friend!" Pellwormer leaned against the bed, but he could only get out with difficulty what he wanted to say: "I shall follow you soon!"

The housekeeper was sitting in the armchair by the window, her white head was leaning against the back and she had fallen asleep, worn out with watching.

Then Heim and Andrees came. Heim was deeply moved when he saw the changed face of his old teacher and clasped the cold, thin fingers in his warm hands. The pastor looked at him; it was the same look with which in the old days he used to tell the boy at the Heidehof: "Go to the garden, Heim, and fill your pockets with apples. Then go round by the back way, so that Liese won't see you." Liese had been his housekeeper then.

When he saw Andrees he tried to raise himself somewhat. Finding he could not, he lay down again, and they listened while he spoke to them in low, broken sentences.

"When Maria died I got ill. And when they were emigrating — the wind blew at the church door — and Schütt was so bitter because he was going away — and the others were not to blame in any way, their spades were always bright and their hands were horny — and yet they had to go away — there was no room for them. Andrees, we are all to blame for it — I, too — that is what has made these last months so hard for me. . . .

"They all said to me: 'Preach! Preach! Speak of the kingdom of God! Other things are not your business!' But Peter preached and baptized on Sunday, on Monday he gave out the bread, on Tuesday, too — the whole week — then on Sunday he could preach full of the Holy Spirit.

"It tore my heart and took away my courage, so that I could not look on God's sun. Maria did her utmost and we looked on. The task was too heavy for the child, and no one helped her. She sank under it. Then they went away and we stood by the roadside and saw them go, and did not say a word or lift our hands. We failed in knowledge and in will. I was not strong enough for the service He had given me. . . . They said: 'Preach!' They said 'Peace! Peace!' — and there was no peace — there was sore need. . . . I am not Judas. . . . I have loved Him very greatly — but I am the man of whom it was said: 'He left his cloak in their hands and fled away naked.' I am Peter. Yet I beg you to believe — I do love Him. Andrees — my Andrees — Heim — love Him. And even if no word of his golden promises has yet been made true for my poor soul, to-morrow morning, when the day breaks, I shall be glad that I have clung to Him, for He has given my life strength and support, He has given warmth to my hands and light to my eyes. You are still young. Help them to get land. . . . I saw a flock of starlings caught by a storm from the east and driven to the west into the sea, screaming as they went. The people are like that when they have no land. It says in the gospel: 'There was a rushing sound.' . . . It is a pity — but nothing is done. . . . They say: 'Preach!'"

Later on, while they bent over his bed, he began to pray for

the whole parish: "Bless the heath and the March, the wheat and the potato fields. Let the heath lessen and the March grow. Let the cultivated land increase and the grazing land lessen. Bless the plough and the spade, which is the German sword. Bless the children who are at home, and those who come home at Christmas, and those who will never return. Bless the children who are in the service and who wear the Kaiser's uniform, and those in Iowa. Schütt — forgive him for railing at his home; he knew not what he did. Make his children strong against sin; thou knowest, it is the fourth generation. Help all of us in our need, and now help me —"

His voice and his breath failed.

Pellwormer said the Lord's Prayer. He had been to church every Sunday, and so he prayed in the very tone and manner of the dying man, who seemed to listen. . . . "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever and ever! Amen."

After awhile Schoolmaster Haller stepped closer, bent down, and looked in the dying eyes.

"I am so eager to know," said the dying man.

Yes! Johannes Frisius had always been eager to know; he had looked with wide, questioning eyes at life and nature and books. And he looked with the same questioning eyes into the other world.

The next afternoon Andrees stood by his mother's bed. She had not risen as yet, but she was sitting up, and she wore a white morning cap, one of those large ones which completely cover the hair and look so cheerful and grandmotherly. Anna Haller, who had always been on good terms with the old lady, was there in a large clean apron; the two cheerful rooms were lit by the morning sun, and she presided there with as much importance as a young mother.

He told her that he was returning, for a time at any rate, to Flackelholm, but she did not seem to be afraid.

"Well, go," she said, "I have time enough to pray for you. I have always been afraid that the money your father spent there would give you no rest, and that your father's death would only make you more determined to conquer Flackelholm. The Strandigers are obstinate; I am too weak for them."

She said nothing of Maria, but she said Franz often came to her and told her how he managed the Hof.

"He is a capable steward, Andrees. It was a good idea to make him manager in your absence. Only be quick with the work at Flackelholm, so that you may come back in the autumn. Then next spring, when the year's mourning is over, you can marry Ingeborg. Give my love to Ingeborg!"

Then he went away, after he had pressed her white head to his breast.

He went to the Heidehof before starting for Flackelholm. When Heim asked him, "What do you intend to do now?" he answered, "You will soon hear."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE death-bed that Andrees had seen gave him strength. If a man has his mind fixed on something grave, the sight of a death-bed makes him only the more certain and clear and assured. Death is a monarch of great natural majesty. Those who have audience with him never forget his face; they grow strong of purpose.

It appeared to Andrees, after he had seen that death-bed, that his eyes grew clearer. He went alone on his long, quiet journey through the Watt; he was on foot, with his compass in his hand, and he was tracking his way by the stakes and by the wagon-track of the day before which had not been completely erased by the tide; his thoughts were with the plans which he had made in those quiet days at Flackelholm; they had been strengthened at the death-bed of his old friend and blessed by his mother.

After his soul had recovered its balance and, as it were, risen from its knees, it began to open its eyes and look around. The narrative of old times which he had heard the day before, and which told him of the origin of his family and his name, had shown him the grave, lofty countenance of the past, and the words of the dying man had revealed the yet loftier one of the future. He stood between them, a man who had already the first half of his life behind him, and who, after another such period, would be dying too. As he thought of it he had arrived at the stake marked by a cross, which was the middle of the way and its highest point, and he looked back towards the old land and across to the new, and he saw the new land lying there, but neither road nor path leading to it. He reflected that it was just the same in life: a man must guide himself by the nearest stake, and so he must move from one task to another, then he would come to the new country, and the tasks of life, taken one by one, would point the way for him to death. And as he stood there in the midst of the pathless Watt, over-

whelmed by its mighty loneliness and superhuman greatness, he, the little wanderer beside the thin birch stem, said to himself: "I will dare it. He may give what He will; I will trust Him and not grow weary."

He extended his arms towards Flackelholm, and since he was alone — otherwise he could not have done it, for who ever saw a man on our coast on his knees — he knelt there by the stake in the sands, not so much like one who prays, but rather like some one who is tired or is searching for an object on the ground. He picked up a shell which lay there and put it in his pocket.

At that very time Ingeborg was standing on the dunes with the big telescope in her hand; she leaned back against the roof of the hut and looked across the Watt and thought, "I am anxious about him. I cannot be at rest. Three times I have thrown away the stocking which I was knitting for him — he thinks Antje is doing it — and three times I have run up on the dunes."

She shook her head sadly. "No, it is not anxiety, it is something else; it is longing. I tried to restrain it; I thought it was dead like my sister; but it was only stunned. It comes back again, so sweet and so terrible. There is Andrees Strandiger coming. That is his step. That is his figure. And that is his hair, which shows dark over the forehead. The blood comes to my heart and makes it beat and my eyes grow dark. I *will* control it; he shall not see it. If it comes like fire in my eyes I will close them. I will go away soon. When I see that his eyes are clear again, and that he has regained courage, I will go back to the Strandigerhof and look across to Flackelholm, and hope and wait. I wonder that everything has been so quiet here for so long. What eyes he used to have then on the heath! They have no brightness now. I long to see them as they used to be on the heath. He is mine and I am his, and I look in his eyes and then — then I cannot hide what is in my own. I must keep quiet," she said softly, shaking her head, "and not think too much."

She looked across the Watt. There was the small, black point that might be Andrees. She raised the telescope, gazed through it, and the strong glass showed her how he knelt down and rose, and then came on. Her heart grew perfectly tranquil. She went slowly down the dunes towards the hut, and

thought: "He will be two hours longer. I will put on another dress, but I will not go to meet him."

Two hours later she was close to the Dieksander Gatt; the grey-black sheep-dog stood beside her. She stood on the last tuft of grass and did not move. She saw how he took off his high boots and went into the Priel, whose water was more than knee-deep. Then he came up over the wet sand, and when he was still a long way off he made a sign of greeting, and said, "Good morning, Ingeborg." She did not move, but she looked at him and recognized the strength in his face, and a certain self-confidence in the very way he carried his head. She felt happy, and came down quickly from her green island. She gave him her hand and nodded to him, and forgot to hide the fire in her eyes.

It stirred his heart when he saw the lovely colour on her cheeks and the tender smile and the down-dropped lids, and her fair hair wound in plaits. Then they went on side by side and told each other what had happened, and they tried to be simply like two comrades who are good friends, and have in many ways the same interests, but it was not possible any more.

From that day onwards Andrees was busy from morning till night. Reimer Witt and he went on expeditions lasting for hours. They could be seen on the horizon like two dark lines, and Ingeborg's arms grew tired with holding the telescope.

"How is it they have got so high up there, Antje? Look. It is just as if there were an island."

Antje laid her hand over her eyes. "There is no island," said she, "but there will be one. The mud is gathering there: a great quantity of it."

"They are putting a pole in the mud."

"Reimer has covered the pole with clay; they want to see how far up the clay has been washed away when the tide goes down. I think it will be hardly wet to-day. Yesterday I saw more than a hundred birds sitting there."

"Could you see that with the naked eye?"

"Yes. Can't you see the seals lying there? There to the side? There are about a dozen; they are lying in the sun on the firm slope."

Ingeborg looked through the telescope and found them. She observed in silence the strange behaviour of the creatures, how

they rolled about and stood up on their short feet and raised their white breasts and dragged themselves forward; they looked not unlike men who are lying down, but lift themselves on their elbows, and it was plain they were the originals of the many mermaid stories. Or to quote Heim, "Who can say, Eva, that these stories are fables? Or — What do you say, Ingeborg?"

"That one can never talk sense with you, Heim," Ingeborg was accustomed to answer.

Ingeborg lowered the glass and said: "Do tell me, Antje, what they are doing? The day before yesterday they made a deep hole in the dunes and they found some water and brought it to me to make coffee; they said it was good enough to drink; and they contradicted me most unreasonably, as men do, for it was not true. I had tasted the water myself. And yesterday he said: 'The water is better, much better. Taste it again, Reimer?' And it was not a bit better."

She talked on, pleased to speak of him, and glad that he worked so busily.

Antje looked thoughtfully across the Watt, and suddenly, as she did sometimes, she began to speak of her dead hero.

"To-morrow will be the anniversary of Gravelotte," she said, "and I wonder if he will come back at last. I have grown old and weary waiting for it. — Or do you think, Ingeborg, that he is really dead?" She looked forlornly over the shore. "But then I should be able to find him! I looked for him in the last storm but I could not find him."

But Ingeborg went on talking of the man who filled her heart.

"Yesterday they were searching under the water we call the dead water: there among the dunes."

"I gave it that name," said Antje proudly. "It was brought by the storm of three years ago."

"And Reimer said, when we were sitting at supper — you were out catching flounders — 'We must have something there to help the soil. We must have bean straw or willow twigs.' I saw Andrees make a sign to him and look at me; but Reimer had to show off his wisdom. 'The sand,' he said, 'that is blown up from the surf will be caught in the straw. Then we shall soon have a new sand-hill which will cost us nothing

and a pond which has no connection with the salt water.' Then Andrees nodded and began to speak of other things."

Ingeborg talked, sitting on the bench and looking over the Watt, while Antje, by the side of the hut, hung the washing on the line.

Towards evening they both came home, tired but with a tremendous appetite. Reimer Witt ate in silence and devoured thirty sea-gulls' eggs which Antje had collected in the morning; Andrees and Ingeborg had got tired of them.

When Reimer laid his fork down he said: "I have killed a seal. It was too fat to carry but I will bring it to-morrow."

And he looked out anxiously to see what the weather would be and whether the tide would wash it away.

"That was why you drove in the stake," said Ingeborg, leaning on the table.

Then Reimer looked at Andrees and said: "We must take the glass with us to-morrow so that no one can watch us."

"Well, do it!"

Ingeborg leaned back on the table, flushing with joy, for she had seen a mischievous look on Andrees's face.

"Reimer has killed one," he said, "and I have shot one. As soon as we can get the beasts to-morrow Antje must boil down the blubber."

"A nice task!" said Ingeborg.

"You shall stir it," said Andrees.

She glanced at him and her overflowing gladness sparkled in her eyes like the tide in sunshine.

He looked grave and did not glance at her.

Early the next morning they both went out and came back heavily laden with the seals.

"We have found a new land out there," said Andrees. "And called it Sealsknoll as Reimer Witt suggested."

"It has been called that for a long time," said Antje, and laughed.

"Who has been there before us?"

"The sturgeon fishers from the other side watched in ambush there for hours. When they came back they brought a little seal with them which was cleaner than they were, for they had got covered with mud from crawling on the shore. And every year some stupid fellow from Hamburg comes down the Elbe and lands from his yacht on the Dieksander

Gatt and then goes to Sealsknoll and lies there on his stomach in the mud and barks at the seals till they lift their heads above the water. You are not the first."

"In ten years," said Andrees, "there will be green land there. And it will not be long before the two islands are joined together and there will be a shorter road to the mainland. Antje, have you ever tried to come a shorter way to the Koog?"

"No," she said, "it's all very deep. The best way to Flackelholm is by boat from Büsen through the Flack river into the Dieksander Gatt."

Andrees nodded.

"Do you hear?" he said to Reimer.

Reimer was nailing the sealskin, which was dripping with fat, on the wooden wall of the hut to dry. He did not turn round but said —

"We will do everything in its turn. Only give us time!"

They acted like people who have important plans not sufficiently developed to be entrusted to others, or like those who have made some discovery but who have not yet a patent for it.

Ingeborg listened quietly.

In the following days the two men visited the sturgeon fishers, who lay far out in the Dieksander Gatt, and discussed with them the results of their task; they were lonely, taciturn men who worked standing in the Priel in their high, greased boots; they showed them the fish which they had caught and which were dragged through the water after the boat by long cords fastened to the gills. They were fine fellows.

In the evening Ingeborg was told to make strong coffee as there were six or seven guests coming. The crab fishers came from the south where they had landed, barefooted, and spitting from time to time, and they sat down and praised the coffee. Some were clever sailors, weather-beaten skilful men who had served in the Kaiser's navy, and been on long voyages. Some had become bankrupt in other occupations, and now came to find work in the sea of the Watt. On the narrow roads of the mainland they had not succeeded in keeping or gaining their daily bread and their dignity as citizens, but they found both in the trackless, endless Watt. They had not always good fortune; since they were unaccustomed to the management of a boat, they sometimes got shipwrecked.

In the previous spring a furious storm from the northwest had driven one of these men ashore in the surf. The others had escaped, but he could not. When the anchor dragged he was carried away. With great difficulty and peril, holding his boy in his arms, he sprang from the bow of the boat which had struck hard on the sand. He had saved himself and his child in that way. Now he stood on the dunes and looked across. The boat was still lying there, stretched out like a stranded whale, its thin ribs showing against the sky.

"It was a mad voyage," he murmured. "I had headache for three days, and was afraid I should go mad, for the shore was like stone and the boat struck so frightfully hard. What would his mother have said if I had returned home without the boy!"

He stood awhile, nodding his head gravely, and looked into the distance. Then he turned to the hut where he had spent the night with his boy, both freezing and hungry.

In the hut they talked, slowly, in their broad, pleasant dialect, as the sailors on our coast always do. They do not care to change their manner of speech; they like it to be as broad as the flounder which swims in the Priel. They all talked at first of previous visits which they had made to the quiet island. They had nearly all been once or twice to Flackelholm and in the log hut. One had been enticed to the shore by his curiosity, and another by the tediousness on board ship. Others had gone along by the surf to see if they could find a board or some wreckage that might be useful. The shore of Flackelholm was noted for holding better things than wood and dead seals. Then they spoke of strange appearances which they had seen at Flackelholm. One had been going at twilight from the hut to his boat, and had seen a little way off a giant figure passing by; he could not say whether it was male or female—but it was certainly a spirit and no human being. It was a merry spirit too, for it had leapt and danced. Another said that one evening, six years ago, he had gone to the hut, having had the stupid idea of sleeping there. But he could not open the door, and when he kicked against it he heard a yelling cry as if some one were wakening up from a nightmare. This was his story, and he swallowed a great gulp of coffee and said: "You know I don't lie."

Antje filled his cup again and glanced at her brother with

her wild, cunning smile. Reimer Witt looked gravely and sympathetically at his sister's face.

One of the guests knew Reimer Witt. They had slept together on the campaign at Metz; when the rain fell heavily they had crept close and shared everything: twigs and warmth, and the vermin they could not get rid of. They had become good friends. Reimer got him to talk of Flackelholm, how the mud gathered, and the grazing land and the course of the Priel, the landing-places and the surf, and when he had explained all he knew — and he knew a great deal — the sly fellow said: "Man" — for such a cautious way of approaching a subject is the usual custom in this neighbourhood, even among good friends — "Man!" said Reimer, "I have almost thought I should like to live at Flackelholm. I would keep sheep and geese, whole flocks of them. There is only one difficulty — the winter!"

The old comrade lifted up his sandy head. "Yes, the winter!"

"How long is the water frozen?"

"It depends on circumstances. About two months!" said red beard.

"And then no one can land here?"

"Yes! they can sometimes. The water is open first in one place and then in another. You have to know the currents round the island. They are very difficult, let me tell you. It takes a lifetime to learn them."

"You have no family?"

"No! I have been too long out there," and he glanced over beyond the Neuwerk lighthouse.

"Come with me," said Reimer. "I will show you something."

He stepped out with him before the hut, and talked to him a long time. His old comrade nodded thoughtfully, raised his eyebrows, and said at last —

"There is one thing that occurs to me, if he means to stay here with us — is he a fine person? I can get on with all kinds of people but not with fine people."

Then Reimer gave the most honourable witness on Andrees Strandiger's behalf —

"He is quite an ordinary man."

"Well, then, so far as I'm concerned, it is all right."

The others came out of the hut, Andrees with them. They liked him because he was quiet, because he spoke briefly and after reflection, as they did. Reimer and his comrade walked together behind.

Reimer returned to the hut before the rest and found Ingeborg clearing the table.

"What a smell there is here!" she said, and looked at him sharply.

"They put some schnapps in the coffee," said Reimer.

During the following days the two examined the growth and nature of the grass and herbage which covered the flat land; it stretched far and wide over an extent of some hundred hectares. There were many different species. Everything that will grow on the new land by the North Sea was to be found there. They grew in rich confusion on the ground. There was that fine short grass which is called Drückdahl, because it covers the ground like a firm thick mat; sea pinks grew among it. There was a rich, bright green plant, not unlike the first shoots of onions. There were grey, hard plants something like heather, which covered great stretches; beneath them showed the naked grey soil. Reimer took a shoot from everything that grew there and bit into it and tasted it, and said: "Some things are good and some things are just weeds, but I don't think there is a single stalk on the whole island that could injure the animals." They examined the watercourse which started close to the hut and ran into the Watt, discharging in the Dieksander Gatt. They measured its depth and searched its bottom, and brought back crabs and fish which they had caught in hand-nets. When they returned Ingeborg heard Andrees say: "You are right; we must have a regular connection with Büsen. We must have a boat and a man who knows the water. I will write to your red-headed friend about it."

That evening was very mild and sunny; Reimer and Antje had gone out once again to fish — for Antje had said, "You don't understand that!" Andrees came back from the shore and stood before Ingeborg, who was sitting sewing in the sun; he said hesitatingly —

"Ingeborg, I have a strange request to make. My hair and beard are growing perfectly wild; I daren't cut them

myself, and Reimer, in spite of his fame for cutting his children's hair, won't trust himself to do it, and one can't expect Antje."

She sprang up and came back out of the hut with the scissors gleaming in her hand; a delicate colour had suffused her fresh soft cheeks.

"Stand still," she said, with her heart beating. And she began to cut. "I cut Fritz's hair," she said.

"I saw you did. That was why I came to you."

She cut timidly, bending her body away from him and turning her head from side to side, holding back stiffly and thinking, "I wish he wouldn't look at me."

Her cheeks burnt.

He saw what the trouble was and looked fixedly towards the wall of the hut where the sealskin was fastened.

"I didn't know," she said slowly, "that it was so difficult to cut round the ear."

"Never mind, try."

She tried, but her hand trembled, and the lobe of his ear showed a red drop of blood. She threw the scissors on the sand, stamped on the ground, and cried.

"Oh, Ingeborg. Don't cry!" He picked the scissors up kindly and full of sympathy, and gave them back to her.

"We mustn't leave it like that. You must come closer to me."

"I can't do it! I can't do it!" She had sunk down on the seat looking wretched; her eyes were full of tears and she shook her head as she snipped the scissors in the air.

"You must have courage. Try again."

"You are too tall for me!"

Then he knelt down before her and looked up at her, and she set to work slowly, holding his ear in her hand and guarding it carefully from the dangerous scissors. He saw her face close before him and wondered at all the little elves which seemed to be at work there, some sad and some mischievous, but not a single wicked one.

The next morning was very hot. The two men had gone on the shore with the horses to get several useful beams and casks and chains which had been driven up by the last tide. Ingeborg went towards the dead water, as they called

it. Reimer had sounded it and found that it had a good firm bottom and that there were no dangerous holes. Ingeborg had been assured that she could bathe there. She bathed in the morning sun.

She felt fresh afterwards, but a little tired, and with her hair still loosened, went quickly over the hot sand and lay down in the field among the plants and flowers, and close to the cart road which ran along inside the chain of dunes. She felt very tired and thought: "When the cart comes I shall waken up." She thought once more: "He must not find me here." When she fell asleep she seemed to seek him in dreamland and find him, and he was kind to her; a happy smile covered her face. She did not know that she had purposely put herself in his way.

As she lay asleep he came alone through the grass and the flowers, thinking of her; he saw her and stood still, over-powered at first by astonishment and then by her charms, her whole face and figure were as tender and pure and full as a fresh rosebud in the morning dew. Her loose hair was mingled with the short grass and small dainty flowers; with her head thrown back and her arms extended, she seemed in the attitude of entreaty. The grass was blowing softly, larks sang close by, in the distance the sea-gulls were calling, the air was full of vigour and freshness, and Ingeborg, as she lay there, had her part in everything and was the loveliest thing of all. He knelt down and looked at her and for the first time his eyes showed that tranquil pure radiance which is the fire of love passing from one heart to another. He looked at her a long time. A bee hummed over them, a sea-gull cried and that awakened her; she saw him looking at her and, still half in dreamland as she was, she opened her eyes wide and happily and said slowly —

"Do you love me so much?"

She had already risen to her knees, and she stretched out her hands and entreated him —

"Go away, Andrees! Go away!" Her hair fell over her hands, and she covered her face with them.

He went away across the dunes back to the shore, and did not return till evening.

Ingeborg was very pale when she came back to the hut.

Towards evening, when the tide went out, he came home,

saw that Reimer was harnessing the horses, hesitated a moment, and went to the hut.

Ingeborg stepped out of the low door, ready for her journey.

"I am going, Andrees!" she said, without looking up. They went slowly side by side to the top of the dunes. "I will go and see Maria's grave," she said.

He nodded. "You are right."

When they stood on the summit together he took her hand.

"You are pure and strong; I must have you for my whole life."

She hung her head. "It must not be for some time, Andrees."

"I will stay on Flackelholm," he said, "as long as the Strandigerhof is in strange hands. I will not be idle, I will make a dyke here and build a house; I will make trenches and dams and explore the Watt and gain new land. My fathers fought with the sea and I will fight too." He clenched his hands and his eyes took a gloomy fire. "I have wasted a lot of time and sinned; but good shall come out of the sin. I can't ask you to share this life with me."

"My life is with yours, Andrees, wherever that may be. I am like Maria in this, that I am true. When you think it may take place then send for me."

"Ingeborg!"

"We must be quiet and strong, Andrees."

"Give my love to my old mother. For her sake I wish I could come back to the Strandigerhof before the lease is out; but Flackelholm shall not be forgotten again."

They stood for awhile together looking across the land which rose above the water for miles.

"The brooding is done with; work has begun."

They shook hands at parting.

## CHAPTER VII.

AUTUMN came. All was quiet round Eschenwinkel. The emigrants wrote very few letters; those who had stayed at home had gone to Flackelholm. On Saturdays, when the tide permitted, they came home to their wives and children.

A small flock of sheep were grazing on Flackelholm, to put to test the quality of the grass; a number of geese came down every morning from the dunes. Antje looked after them and was very proud of them. Four horses found abundance of pasture and kept a good appearance in spite of their work.

The red-headed sailor had his boat in the Dieksander Gatt. He got them fish and other supplies which he brought from Büsen. He showed himself a capable man who was sober and kept his word; the bundles of twigs they slept on at Metz, wet as they were, had not spoilt his character.

Fifteen men, who had been accustomed to digging from their youth, spent three months in the great field digging out the choked trenches which Andrees's father had made twenty years ago and making new ones. They made the trenches six feet across and a foot deep and threw the earth up in the midst like a broad wall so that the flood-tide could carry the mud deep into the green land. When the tide had gone three times up the trenches and back again there were no more spade marks to be seen, the sea water had left behind so much soft rich soil.

An imperial official had come at Strandiger's request, had spent three days watching the tide and the ebb, had waded knee-deep in mud, and had marked down in the hut lines and trenches and outlines and surfaces. He had wiped the sweat from his brow and gone out again in the rain with Reimer Witt's old "waterproof" round his shoulders, had come back in the evening and eaten flounders and potatoes in their skins with the appetite of a farm labourer. The men wondered and were pleased that such a great and learned person should be so cheerful and natural; they gained confidence and ventured,

without his asking, to call his attention first to one thing and then to another; so he learnt more and did more and was a better servant to his king than those assessors who drink their beer and lament that their birth and position prevent them from getting close to the people. He had grown up on the shore like Andrees and his penwork had not made him forget his spadework. When he went away he nodded to Andrees. "You do honour to your name," he said. "If it were not that I have to superintend the dams and the dykes and the trenches and the jetties and all the work that goes on I should envy you your property and the place where you live."

On the wide fruitful fields of the Strandigerhof the crops were gathered in. It was a good harvest but still Franz Strandiger was not in a position to pay the whole sum due, for the selling price of corn and cattle had not been good. All Saints approached and he had not sufficient money; even if he spent his entire profit from the whole harvest he would still be in want of money, for he could not face the winter with empty hands. Then came bad days for the labourers and the foreign overseer, and many a rough word in Low German or a strange Polish oath sounded over the wide farmyard, up to the blind woman and the quiet girl sitting at her side. His restlessness drove Franz out of his room and away from the farm somewhere where it was lonely; it soon grew his custom when the tide went out to take long walks into the Watt. And as his nature was one easily impressed it was not long before this great fearful loneliness entered into his heart; the wild Watt appealed to that proud nature of his. He wandered for hours with his gun on his arm, along the watercourses, through the still gleaming pools and over the great beds of shells. He often brought something home. Now a strange sea-gull for Schoolmaster Haller, now a duck for the kitchen, sometimes a seal which he had brought to shore after he had shot it, wading and swimming at the risk of his life. He got to know the Watt very well as far as the point marked by the cross stake. When he wandered in this way he forgot his troubles about money and getting on, about rent and quarter day. His eyes grew calmer, they took a quiet grave expression, and his thoughts soon turned to Ingeborg Landt. He sat opposite her for an hour every day when he visited the blind woman

to give her, as he said to himself, an account of his stewardship.

Franz Strandiger had never before known the meaning of a true and deep love. When Andrees and Heim Heiderieter had watched the growing girls with their boyish but genuine enthusiasm, Heim expressing his admiration aloud and Andrees more sparingly, Franz had only laughed and mocked. Later on his acquaintances, first one and then another, had chosen girls for their wives, girls who were conspicuous neither for their beauty nor their intelligence nor their money, and when they explained this step with the brief phrase "I love her," he always shook his head as if over an incomprehensible mystery. It seemed as if his very character made it impossible that he should ever feel the love which is peculiar to normal and unspoilt men, which arises from physical and mental affinity and is so strong and unique. In this very fact lay the explanation of the curious circumstance we mention now. Franz Strandiger's education and surroundings had arrested his moral development, suppressed and embittered him. In his childhood he had always been told that getting on was the one true principle to adopt in life. From his sixteenth year he had been, first in the city and afterwards on some large estates, among people who were morally ruined. So it had come about that his sight was dulled and he could not appreciate in woman either the ideal or the intellectual, only the sensuous and the possessions, more or less valuable, which she might have. It was not the natural type of his character which prevented him from feeling a pure love — for he too had the good true blood of the Strandigers — but it was his soul-killing education and the inward impurity which had resulted from it.

Then Maria Landt came under his observation and he occupied himself with her. He meant her simply to help him from a monetary point of view. She came close to him in her childlike anguish and her childlike confidence. He felt for the first time the real meaning of a noble personality, the strength of Christian faith and the power of a pure soul. It was something quite new to him; tenderness and purity revealed themselves to him in all their charm, looked at him entreatingly from her dark eyes and told him that they were ready to do much for others. And she did much! How much, no one ever knew. She was torn away from him as

if into another world. She had, however, done something for him; she had shaken his old, hard views of life and given him the desire to see if he could not regard his surroundings and the world and life in general with gentler and more far-seeing eyes.

And now Ingeborg Landt had come to the Strandigerhof. After that terrible, sad March day she had gone to Flackelholm; she had been restless and not in the mood to excite love, but she had always awakened his interest; she came back when the summer was well advanced, a quiet, gentle, womanly creature with something melancholy and mysterious surrounding her like a veil; she looked at him with radiant eyes and filled him with the eager desire to know what mystery it was, at once tender and beautiful, which those eyes concealed. It was with his new sight that Franz Strandiger regarded this new vision. Even in his blindness something in Maria had compelled his reverence and wakened a warm interest; now he saw the same noble, pure, warm-hearted personality in another shape, one much more beautiful, in a most becoming dress — her mourning robe — with lovely, quiet eyes, silent and therefore doubly beautiful. And he saw her daily, for hours at a time, when he talked with the old lady and gave her the report of his stewardship. In those hours he talked sincerely and kindly of the work on the Hof, of the future of Flackelholm and of his journeys into the Watt, and he saw her sitting before him with her fair head bent over her sewing, only lifting her glorious eyes now and then. In those hours Franz Strandiger's first love was born.

It came with all its trouble and its joy and brought much more sorrow than joy. He did not guess that Ingeborg Landt could be in any close relation to Andrees. Andrees had always clung to Maria, and if Ingeborg had gone with him to Flackelholm it was only as she might have gone with a sick brother. It did not trouble him that she was reserved and shy, and that she only looked at him kindly when he told her of his daring excursion after the seal. Was it not the way of young girls to be shy with those for whom they felt partiality.

The old Hobooken went with her keen eyes through the kitchen, and the stables, and the barn. People avoided her and grumbled at her. In the spring she had driven those she did not like away from the Hof, but Franz had ordered

her shortly not to interfere in his affairs. Then she devoted herself with all her keenness and energy to matters inside the house. One afternoon she told the village children to pluck currants and gooseberries to sell in the town, for everything was to be turned into money. She told the children to sing. They sang: "I have lost my horse, my dapple-grey horse," and "Dear Fatherland, canst be at peace." They went on very well for awhile, plucking and singing, but then little curly-headed Bernhard Engel asked —

"Do you know why we are to sing?"

"No!"

"Because when we sing we can't eat."

After that the singing was considerably weaker, and it must be acknowledged that some were not in a condition to sing and others tried to sing through the nose, which did not sound pretty. The end was that they were all driven away suddenly by a storm of scolding like starlings in a hail of small shot. So the matter ended unfortunately. Towards autumn, when the eggs increased in value, the old woman herself went round the barns and searched in dark corners, collecting the eggs laid by such hens as had strayed from their nests. Then the hired man, thinking it was a weasel which took them, and wishing to catch the stealthy thief, had set the usual iron trap. The trap had sharp teeth, and he placed it in a corner and an egg between its jaws to entice the wild creature. The old lady was short-sighted and unaccustomed to the darkness; she reached into it to get the egg and screamed aloud. The doctor had to bind up serious wounds, and the whole village talked of the matter a great deal, but with very little sympathy.

When quarter day approached the old Hoboken wrote to her brother in Berlin. She told him what the position was and asked for help. Three days passed. They met the postman at the door and felt full of anger against the man, who approached with such slow, indifferent steps, and greeted them tranquilly as he put the newspapers on the table to the left of the door. Nothing but newspapers!

Her son went whistling over the house and round the farm. Under the ends of his moustache there showed a scornful mocking smile, as if he cried out against fate in all the bitterness which filled his soul: "Are you returning, my evil des-

tiny? Just as I had land and wife in my hands!" On the fourth day he went into the parlour and said to his mother —

"I have something to tell you. I have just returned from the heath. I had gone to watch from the distance how Heim Heiderieter was getting his potatoes in all by himself; I saw a man coming down the Sandway from the village; he has a green hunting-jacket and a feather in his cap; a gun in a yellow case over his shoulder, and a hunting-knife in his belt. He tries to look like a man of thirty, holds himself erect and moves his head briskly, but he is at least sixty. Half the boys in the village are running after him. Tell me who it is!"

"My brother! It will be all right now."

"Yes! It really is. The guide and friend of my youth! The man to whom I have owed everything since I was ten; all my bread and all my misfortunes. He is coming once more to give me a little piece of bread and perhaps a great piece of misery. All the old humiliations will begin again, and you tell me 'It will be all right.'"

The front door opened and they both went to the entrance.

"My dear brother!"

"Good day, Uncle Felix! My old friend and patron! How do you like the Hobokenhof?"

Felix Hoboken looked round. "Where is your cousin?" he asked.

"He is sitting on an island in the North Sea and howling at the surf. Are you afraid of him, uncle?"

"No! But I like to avoid all unpleasantness; for it either gets on my nerves or spoils my sport. Where is he? On what island?"

"We can go across! It will be a splendid sail! Sailing on the North Sea, uncle, is the best of all sports; there really is something in it!"

The old man sat down wearily on a chair, settled his woollen shirt and collar, and made a sweeping movement with his hand.

"A fortnight ago I was in Carinthia. I climbed two mountains! Telegraphed to the duke! Received kind remembrances! And have I really got to the North Sea?"

"To discover islands!" laughed Franz.

"You have no feeling for sport, my dear fellow! Neither

had your father, though he was an officer. It wouldn't be a bad idea if I could get you to care for it!"

"The North Sea is not a cradle, uncle!"

The old man stood up, walked stiffly to the window and said, turning away his face —

"We can soon test which of us has the most skill and courage. I will send for a boat from Hamburg; I can afford it!" He made a decisive movement with his hand, still looking towards the window and over the farmyard, and said —

"Now for *your* affairs! But I'll tell you this — that I don't feel bound to save you from the hole you've got yourself into. Why didn't you ask my advice?" He struck on his breast. "My sport shall not suffer for your so-called undertakings. My sport is my life! You will have the kindness, Franz, to bring your books to my room, and to-morrow we will consider them."

Franz Strandiger had listened to these words with wide eyes. They struck him like lashes from a whip. He tried to say something, but bethought himself and turned round and went to his room. He sat down before his writing-table and struck his fist on it two or three times in wildest anger. Spots of blood showed on the bright oak surface. Then he sat crouching for awhile before he could utter his wrath. The words leapt like fire from his lips. "When I was away I had to be a servant to other people and now the torture of my childhood returns again! I will get him in my power! The time shall come when he shall beg at my feet! Curse of my childhood!"

Every evening, when twilight came, old Frau Strandiger said to her nurse —

"Now go to the Heiderieters, Ingeborg, and give them my good wishes. You can easily go. I sha'n't find it tedious; I am not lonely. I have lived through so much; a whole great volume in dark binding with a cross on almost every page, and a crown, I hope, on the last. Yes, go! I will read in the volume."

Then the doors opened softly up-stairs — the door of the sitting-room, of the kitchen and then of the room that looked towards Flackelholm; then some one came lightly and swiftly

and softly down the stairs. Franz Strandiger would stand in the porch, or step out of his room, or wait at the front door ready to go out, and he would look at the beautiful girl, trying to keep his eyes and his bearing under strict control, and scarcely able to master himself. He was clever. He did not wish to frighten her. But he could never see enough of her; her tall, strong figure, her brilliant eyes, and her fine head, which she held a little bent, or its movement as she looked up. So he watched every day to see her pass, and receive her brief greeting, and when she had gone out he would go up the stairs that her dress had swept as she came down, and take hold of the banister her hand had touched. It came upon him like a tempest. One day it invaded his heart, this wild, foolish love; the next it blazed from his eyes when he looked after her going down the stairs; on the third and fourth days it compelled him to follow her when she went to the Heidehof.

Ingeborg Landt felt that he wanted something from her, and was afraid, and yet tried to conceal her fear. She returned his proud greeting with equal pride; she would have nothing to do with Franz Strandiger. In the room she sat opposite to him in silence; she seldom spoke to him, and when she did it was as if to a stranger, but she could not help his proud figure and his quiet, reflective words making some impression upon her.

He observed her carefully. No expression or movement escaped him. He waited. He waited for the favourable opportunity; he wished to take her by storm with one quick, strong assault. So when he passed and she looked at him, his eyes did not say "I love you," but "I am strong, are you stronger?" She observed it, and passed him quietly, with lowered eyes, and went to the Heidehof.

At times, when he was in a good humour — he was a man of moods and could easily regard his position from another point of view — he would feel his old high spirits. One day he had been in the town; he had sold a hundred tons of wheat at a good price, and had a prospect of getting credit; when he returned he went to the stables, and there he discovered the servants and the two workmen from the Geest amusing themselves with the popular trials of strength. They had got the yoke and the linen harness and bound to it two

full sacks of wheat, weighing two hundred pounds each, and they were trying to carry them along the floor; of the four men who tried only two could manage it. Then Strandiger stepped up and got them to bring two more harness straps and two half-sacks of wheat and fasten them on and balance them while he supported himself against the wall, and then he carried the six hundred pounds slowly and carefully along the floor, to the astonishment of the men, who uttered expressions of amazement; he stepped heavily to the end and turned round, then the yoke broke.

Ingeborg stood at the other end of the floor and looked at him with wide eyes, fear expressed in her whole bearing; his eyes looked as they had done that time when he had told her not to interfere in men's business, but to leave men's affairs to men.

When he saw her standing there he was still happier. That evening he sat cheerfully in his room; he was full of hope, and thought he could win the land and his bride; he had a bottle of wine before him and was thinking of old times; his high spirits returned, and he wrote on a card, which he addressed, "Herr Heiderieter auf Heidehof"—

"I am glad that Heim Heiderieter's fields are well cared for, but I would put to him the following three questions, since we are all about thirty now. 1. Where is Franz Strandiger's gold-sack? 2. Where are Andrees Strandiger's laurels? 3. Where is Heim Heiderieter's order?"

The man went at once to the Heidehof and found Heim at his writing-table under the lamp; Eva was not there. At first Heim did not understand — then he remembered and flushed and wrote quickly on the other side of the card: "Where are the three comrades?" and sent the man back.

When Franz read it he grew very grave.

In the Heidehof happiness reigned. It was true that this happiness had to struggle, to struggle for years, for there were enemies around. They came into the kitchen where Frau Eva ruled, and to Heim's writing-table. Anxiety was always coming to Heim and saying, "It is no good, Heim; you Heiderieters are sleepy, unpractical people; you can't make much of the Heidehof. Now this year you have been industrious, but you will gradually turn idle and a dreamer like

your fathers, and in your old age the heath will grow over the land you ploughed in your youth."

Then Heim shook himself, stood up and went into the kitchen or the stable, or wherever he could find his wife at work,—his vigorous, beautiful wife, with her dark plaits, her sleeves rolled up, and her bright eyes. She would give him only a nod of her head and a quick, kind glance. Sometimes she would laugh and pass her wet hand over his wrinkled forehead; then she would turn to her work again. He would look at her once more; his eyes would glide over her figure; he would sigh with relief and go back to his writing-table with thoughtful eyes, and write at his first book. The first book!

He had an acquaintance in Kiel, a schoolmaster who had got him books from the university library—great, heavy volumes bound in yellow. The upper edge was dark, as if their heads had grown moss-covered from old age. Most of them were written in Latin, but a few in Low German, a rough, harsh language, stubbly as bean straw. They told of old days and old troubles; of that struggle which Schleswig-Holstein had begun more than seven hundred years ago, a struggle for freedom which had lasted seven centuries. Heim Heiderieter sat and worked, translated and interpreted, turned from one book to another, leaned his head on his hand, walked through the big room with reflective eyes, and did not observe that his young wife passed through and looked at him.

At times discouragement took a stand by the writing-table, looked at him and smiled mockingly. "It is too much for your strength and your artistic power, Heim. Your Heiderieters can do everything, but only by halves." Then he sprang up and went through the house, looking neither left nor right, and walked across the heath. Above the heath was the clear autumn sky. When he returned he had grown calmer. He looked like a child after its prayers, and he wrote some verses down; when his young wife passed through the room again he embraced her and said—

"See, I found this not far from the brook on the heath."

She read it slowly; he himself was not good at reading aloud.

## AUTUMN

The air is still and wondrous clear,  
 Such brightness never saw I here.  
 My cheeks are red and light my breath,  
 What should I reck of the grave or death?  
 But soon o'er all this splendour bowed  
 Will lie the winter's deathlike shroud.

On gold the world seems painted fair,  
 And church and house and tree are there,  
 A golden red! the sun shines free,  
 And see, a leaf falls from the tree.  
 But soon o'er all this splendour bowed  
 Will lie the winter's deathlike shroud.

But there is youth and strength for me,  
 And joy in labour I can see.  
 Amid the reeds, still thick and long,  
 The bird sings its last summer song.  
 Soon over all this splendour bowed  
 Will lie the winter's deathlike shroud.

The leaves will die, their brightness o'er,  
 My cheek will then be red no more.  
 O heart, be strong! O eyes, be bright!  
 Give thanks for all thine inward light.  
 Soon from the winter's deathlike shroud  
 Will rise the spring, in splendour proud.

"I should have scolded you if you had not put in the last verse," she said.

That night he lay awake in bed and breathed softly and slowly, as if he were listening. His young wife raised her shoulder, leaned on her arm, and looked at him. She saw in the moonlight that his eyes were open and bright. Then she lay down and slept again, for she needed sleep.

But he looked and listened. During the day he had been reading of people in the old chronicles; they had evaded him shyly in the bright daylight, but now in the darkness they ventured out. They came so close that he could talk to them. He listened and heard their homely words, now harsh and now lamenting; for their time had been full of harshness and lamentation. At last sleep overcame him — it was just at the

time the marten ventured its first leap up at the side of bacon which hung by the chimney and fell back heavily; then he grew restless in his sleep, and groaned and began to call out.

Once more his wife bent over him. "What is the matter, Heim?"

"The Dithmarchers were encamped on the heath by Bornhôved; they stood up and waved their shields and turned against the Danes; that was what made the beer vat fall."

She laughed and lay down again and fell asleep, the smile still hovering on her lips.

The moon rose higher and tried to look in the big room through the twigs of the pear-tree, but could see nothing. Then it wiped the clouds from its brow and saw the writing-table and the great volumes, old and yellow, lying on the table, and was angry; for it dislikes all hard thinking and every kind of knowledge, and is a thorough dreamer. Then, since the window by the writing-table stood wide open, it stepped on to the window-sill and felt the books with its hands. They grew still yellower and woke up, moved their leaves, and crackled and groaned. An old stout Danish history, in three volumes, said to her sister, "I don't like being here; the man who uses us doesn't deserve us; he is no scholar!"

"He is an enthusiast and a dreamer."

There was a yellow gleam in the light from the angry moon.

"He reads us between the lines!"

"And he often looks across us, far away!"

"Yes," said her sister. "It is very sad. We stood on the shelf of the great State library for twenty years without being used; and now, when we at last enter life, they send us to this ignorant fellow."

"Do you remember the professor who had us twenty years ago?"

"Yes, he was quite another sort of man!"

"He wrote a very learned book, do you remember? And he was very eager about me, much more than about you; he snorted and groaned, and was very learned and wildly excited. He was so greatly excited that he several times wrote on my margin, but I didn't take it in bad part."

"What did he write?"

The leaves rustled lightly. "What is it? I only understand Danish. It must be something very honourable to me. See, it is there!"

There indeed it was, scrawled with a hard lead pencil, "*Ignorantia pyramidalis.*"

"And here?"

There was the brief word "Rot."

"What does that mean?"

"It is a recognition of my learning. I am proud to be a learned book. I, the first-born of us three! Who knows the old times as I do?"

The moon was about to glide down behind the window-seat; it yawned wearily, lamented the whole business of writing books, and was just about to call to the next cloud to cover it. But then another book began to speak; it lay open and face downwards, and its voice sounded muffled. "It was not polite of him to put such an old heavy book as I am down on its stomach, but I will tell you one thing, though: I am the chronicle of the priest, Helmold von Bosau. I am glad that I have escaped at last from the hands of professors and from library shelves and got into the right hands and the right house. I am full of meaning! — so full that I must be read between the lines; my truth and my reality lie far behind my printed letters. The man who reads *you* must have intelligence, but the man who reads *me* must have heart and faith; he must be a poet."

The old book, although it lay on its stomach, began to sing laboriously a Latin monastic song.

The moon glided quietly down from the window-seat, and thought: "That was well said, surprisingly well said for some one lying on his stomach." And like an old man who has experienced everything and loves to remember it, and eager to image to itself the old stories, it tore away all the cloudy veils which lay around and above it, and stood radiant in the sky, and looked with its clear, silver eyes over the whole neighbourhood where the things had happened that were told of in the old book. The neighbourhood of Segeberg and Lubeck, Bornhöved and Plön was full of radiant moonlight that night. People who saw the moonlight rejoiced in it, but they did not know that Heim Heiderieter was the cause.

Every evening in the twilight Ingeborg Landt arrived. The

three sat in the twilight before the green stove. The winter day looked in with sleepy eyes. The burning dark peat, dug from their own moor and mixed with logs of wood, hissed behind the bars, lighted the large cheerful room, and filled its lower half with a red gleam. At times an inquisitive little flame played round the bars and showed the faces of the people seated there and the pictures on the wall.

The three were talking in the gloaming. First Heim conducted them into the old history of the country; they praised one view he took, rejected another, always in their woman's way, thrusting aside the harsh truth and bringing into prominence the things that pleased them, but always full of encouragement for the often despondent writer.

"Never mind, Heim! Have courage. We will tell you candidly if you make anything of it."

"Do you know," said Ingeborg, "once in Hamburg I saw a fine old silver vessel, made in Nuremberg. It was a splendidly moulded cup, the foot was strong and shaped like vigorous roots twining together as they come out of the earth; the stem was firm and stately, like a tree-trunk, strong to the grasp; the cup was of loose foliage, full of strength, and yet airy. It was a strong, graceful thing, and when one looked at it one felt happy and courageous and full of pure thoughts. Inside it was sparkling with gold."

"Yes," said Heim, and looked thoughtful. "It was a cup meant for wine."

"A generous wine!"

"Yes — wine — wine. Not vinegar or something worse!"

"You are right," he said. "Many books have a slovenly or an ugly shape, and their contents are sour. They allow men no more morals than if they were crows, and they reveal a world like a rat cellar. Your words deserve all honour. You are an optimist, because you are a Christian and that accords with your character."

"Those people," said Ingeborg, "take no pride in their home or their history, and they seem to think that God's place is empty."

"Well, well! It is so! And they themselves write to fill up the emptiness."

"Whoever wants to write something good," she said, "must first be a real *man*, humble towards God and proud to the

world. I want to help myself with what I read. It ought to inspire me. It ought to give me strength against every sin, and courage for every fate."

"You are right, beautiful Ingeborg! Priestess of the beautiful."

When they had discussed that subject enough, Eva led them both to talk of Flackelholm. Ah! and Ingeborg was so glad. They talked much, and eagerly; they spoke of the last letter which the red-headed man had brought to Büsen, and at the end Ingeborg rose, and went to the window and read in the twilight, "Love to Ingeborg as well! Ingeborg!" The word was written twice.

And finally Ingeborg took the lead; she bent over the chair where the young wife was sitting, and put her arm round her, and spoke of all kinds of things, and said again and again —

"I will help you, Eva! Anna Haller can keep house for Aunt Strandiger; she manages very well. If it is getting too much for you, and you can do with me now, I am quite ready." But Frau Eva drew herself up to her full height and laughed.

"Not yet, Ingeborg! But later on you and Telsche shall both come. You can look after Heim and Telsche Spieker after me."

So gradually Christmas drew near. It was very quiet this time. Fritz Witt was at Flackelholm, sitting on Antje's knee in a warm room; lighted candles stood on the table and Antje told, word for word, the holy story; Strandiger and Witt were listening. The workmen had gone back to the mainland to keep Christmas with their own people; they would not return till February, when spring began.

In the big room at the Heidehof, the three of them — Heim, Eva, and Ingeborg — stood under the Christmas tree; Telsche Spieker brought the Witt children for apples and nuts and cakes. Telsche looked very grave. When the children had left the house she went into the kitchen with Eva.

"I have more confidence in you than in Heim," she said. "I have received a letter from Witt, which the fisherman from Stülper must have put in his fish basket, the envelope is so dirty. Witt is growing very strange in his old days. Read it!"

A leaf which had been torn from Bertha's copy-book made

Reimer Witt's love-letter; it was written with lead-pencil inside the ruled lines and almost without a mistake.

"DEAR TELSCHE:—My last letter was written from Paris, in the year seventy, and sent to mother; now I am writing this letter to you. You are a mother too—I mean my children's, but, if you are the mother of my children you ought to be my wife. Dear Telsche, I am alone here on Flackelholm. 'All of us,' as our captain said when he tried to get up at Verneville, but was kneeling down and could say no more because he had a bullet in his throat. Write to me soon if we can be 'all of us' together. There is room here on Flackelholm.

REIMER WITT."

"What must I do?" said Telsche, sitting by the hearth and looking grave.

Heim came in.

"Now he is coming too," said Telsche.

He had already got hold of Reimer's letter.

"There's no doubt about that," he said. "Of course you will take him."

"Well? and all the children?"

"But you have them now, or do you mean to leave them again, Telsche?"

"Why not?"

He laughed in her face. "You won't do that, Telsche, you have always liked Reimer Witt."

Eva took the same view.

"He is still a fine-looking handsome man."

But there they made a mistake.

"I am forty years old," said Telsche. "And am I to think about things of that sort?"

"Well, then everything must be as it was last Christmas," said Heim. "The children can wear torn clothes, and Fritz can go and look for heaven and arrive in our manger, though we intended to use it ourselves."

"It is no good talking to you," said Telsche; "I will think it over by myself."

## CHAPTER VIII.

MARCH had arrived. The west wind came rushing from the sea over the wintry land and began to feel its strength. It shook vigorously the elms of the Strandigerhof so that the old crows' nests were flung down. It struck its wet fist against the gable of the Heidehof so that the little window was shaken out of its frame, and the tiny new-born boy screamed on his mother's arm. It blew across the heath to the birch-trees which kept watch before the wood, and shrieked to them: "Lift your heads! Do you see the wrecked boat on the sea and the shipwrecked men? *My work!*"

Ingeborg came every day to the Heidehof for four or five hours. She had undertaken to do the afternoon's work in order to save expense. Then, with hot cheeks, she would cross the heath to the Strandigerhof as evening fell. When she stepped out at the kitchen door the storm seized her and tore at her hair and her clothes, but she loved the mad raging thing. He was the messenger of spring; he came from Flackelholm and brought greetings to the bride. Spring greetings!

On the fourth evening, when she was crossing the heath in the twilight, Franz Strandiger met her. She walked more slowly when she saw him, but she drew herself up a little, stepping out firmly and yet calmly. He did not get out of her way but stood close before her, and she saw again the expression which had so distressed and humbled her; she drew back a step and gave a low cry.

"You needn't be afraid," he said.

Then she drew aside from the path to the heath and said, her limbs trembling and all her pride gone —

"I am promised to Andrees and I will never give him up. Let me go."

He stretched out his hand to her, but his face grew sharp and deathly pale, and all the life which had burnt in his eyes was quenched.

She turned round after she had looked at him and went back to the Heidehof trembling, and cried herself out by Eva's bed.

The next day the storm had gone down, though the sea was still high. Hobooken's new yacht was brought from Finkenwerder where it had been made and put in the harbour of Stülp on the Priel, fifteen minutes away from the Strandigerhof; it was a good boat and finely built.

For five days the weather remained clear and the air light; a fresh wind blew from the southwest and Hobooken and Franz Strandiger went out with old Tüxen. He was an old sailor who kept a little inn on the dyke at Stülp, and they went out five times in the Watt. The boat answered splendidly. The old sportsman was full of pride and happiness; holding the wheel in his hand he listened with a smile of vanity to the praise which Tüxen gave the boat and its master, and Tüxen was not sparing in his praise. He was a cunning fellow, though he looked as if he could hardly count three, and he thought: "The more I praise him the more bottles shall we drink when we get back to my warm room behind the dyke."

Franz Strandiger usually sat alone on the edge of the hatchway. When they went out his dark eyes were always turning towards Flackelholm, whose sand-hills rose with a white gleam from the raging sea; when they were returning he would look to the upper windows of the Strandigerhof that gazed across the dyke to Flackelholm like clear bright eyes. At times, when he was unobserved, he glanced at the chattering old sailor, with his eternal vacuous smile, and his expression changed to cold scorn. When the old sailor caught such a glance he interpreted it in his own way; he nodded to Franz Strandiger, screwed up his little eyes still smaller, praised still more energetically and then sought Strandiger's eyes again to see if he understood, and the master of the Strandigerhof could not conceal his contempt and turned away. The old man still sat and smiled.

The following night the wind rose again and there came a message from Tüxen that the boat had dragged against the harbour and needed a stronger mooring. At noon, when it was ebb tide, they left the Strandigerhof. When they had reached the top of the dyke and were looking round they saw a cart

in the foreland which was going westwards towards the Watt. In front two figures sat side by side, a man and a woman, but they were too far off to be recognized.

"Have you a telescope, uncle?"

He drew first a hunting-knife and then a telescope from one of his many pockets, and gave it to Franz. His hands took hold of it as if they had been made of iron, and immediately afterwards he was watching the cart. He put it together quietly, returned it, and went on in silence. But in his own mind he was speaking angrily. "I saw them quite plainly, Ingeborg and Witt. She was turning her face to him. That sweet, lovely face. She could not help herself, distress and anxiety on his account have driven her there."

He turned round again and looked across to the cart with a fixed, stern face and gloomy miserable eyes.

When they entered the low room of the inn Tüxen already held a bottle. He cleaned the bottle with his great hands, and explained that he had put a new cable to the vessel, but the gentlemen would not be able to take a sail since he was unfortunately prevented from going. Then he brought three glasses, and began to explain how splendidly the boat had behaved the day before.

They emptied the bottle and, since they didn't want to go away, they had a second; Tüxen thought of something fresh to talk about and spoke of a shipwreck which he had experienced in his youth at Flackelholm.

"We could not get away," he said. "It was just as if the witch of Flackelholm had thrown out cords for us and dragged us on to it. We drove and drove into the very teeth of the surf and smashed up our boat at last. My father had got drunk; that was the real reason."

Then old Hoboken, in a loud voice and waving his arms and legs, described a mad voyage from Heringsdorf out into the Baltic.

They drank a great deal. Franz Strandiger sat in silence, his teeth clenched. The old man began to boast; he exaggerated and he lied. The whole thing disgusted Franz unspeakably.

"Do you know," said Hoboken to the sailor, "that if my dear nephew had a little more courage on the water I would

have gone alone with him this afternoon; but the water has no flooring."

The wind howled through the passage by the house and blew vigorously against the windows.

After awhile he said, with twinkling eyes: "If I had not something here," and he made as if counting out money with his thumb and forefinger, "my dear nephew would be still more silent and still more rude."

"If you really mean it," said Strandiger, "I will go alone with you." He stood up and said again: "I should *like* to go with you."

Half an hour later — just about three — they had left the Priel, the Watt also was behind them, and they were crossing towards Blauort before a strong, gusty wind; great foaming waves dashed on the vessel. Old Hoboken stood at the wheel and Strandiger attended to the sail as he was directed.

They had all pressed Ingeborg to go to Flackelholm. Heim had said with a smile: "You must tell him how happy marriage is."

Eva said: "You must tell him that a boy has been born here, and that the boy is very like his mother."

Telsche had said: "When you get to Flackelholm, Ingeborg, then tell Witt, 'If it really must be' — well, you know. I have put my black dress in order and the children's clothes are all right, only Bertha wants a pair of shoes."

By this time Telsche called him quite simply Witt, not Reimer Witt.

All this could not persuade Ingeborg to go; but during those stormy days no news had come. Old Mother Strandiger stood for hours by the window in the misty twilight with her head bent and listened in distress to the roaring amid the elms and the heavy gusts against the window. Ingeborg had stood by her looking towards Flackelholm. On the fifth day the air grew clearer. It was about nine o'clock, and the old woman felt for Ingeborg's hand.

"Ingeborg, if you — I have only one child, and I am afraid of the sea. I have cause. If you or some one else would try to drive across to Flackelholm."

The same evening Reimer Witt came to get Telsche Spieker's answer and to give news of Flackelholm. He brought

good news: the tide had only just come over the field. The wide surface of the dunes had stood safe and sound, its grass blowing in the spray from the surf. He took good news back with him: the wedding was to be in a month. Telsche Spieker would go herself to the pastor and have the banns read.

Ingeborg still had to go to Flackelholm.

"I want to know," said the old lady, "how he is. He has been so lonely. He is just like his father, true and conscientious. If you dare do it, Ingeborg, go across with Reimer."

They had a troublesome journey. The wind grew stronger, and the tide came in faster and mounted higher than usual; it roared and rushed. When the horses raised their hoofs the tracks were filled with water. Then Reimer Witt drove quickly. They galloped over the high broad ridge marked by the stake with a cross. The Dieksander Gatt was already full of heavily driving water; it turned in its bed and stretched itself out and threw foaming waves against the bank, but the horses went in bravely. The water covered the bottom of the cart, so that Ingeborg had to draw up her knees. Reimer looked at her anxiously, and nodded to her.

"I am not afraid," she said; "but I am a little giddy."

"That is through the moving water."

An hour later they arrived at the block hut, and Antje came out to meet them; her eyes were restless, as they always were in stormy weather.

"It is high tide at six o'clock," she said; "and there will be another storm." She was barefoot, and the wind caught and tore at her clothes. Her hair was not as carefully arranged as usual, and there was excitement in all her movements.

"Where is Andrees?"

"He went at noon with Klaus to Büsen. They are going to bring the first load of stores. Do you know, Ingeborg, that a house is to be built here? It will stand there, and I can always stay here." She laughed and shook her head, and laughed again. "Perhaps," she said, "I shall find Heinrich yet."

Reimer shook his head gently. "When are they coming back?"

"This evening if they can. They will find it difficult to

land at the corner, there; the wind and tide are driving in the surf."

Ingeborg went into the hut and took off her wraps, and then she returned to the cart.

"I will go to the shore," she said, "and watch for his sail."

Standing on the dunes she looked across towards Büsen and scanned the whole horizon in that direction from Blauort to Helmsand. She saw nothing, and was too inexperienced to look to the southeast where Andree's boat was working against the wind, labouring along, but safe in the shelter of the island. The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive; heavy dark grey clouds drove across the sky towards the harbour of the Priel.

She came down from the dunes. Before her the shore extended, grey and firm, stretching out so far that it might have served as an exercise ground for a whole army. It was quite even, with nothing to arrest the eye except here and there a piece of wreckage flung up by the sea — mighty beams and casks and chests, or a seal — or was it a man? — and there, close to it, the boat, with its bare ribs standing up! Just behind a cask, which the storm had torn from somewhere, was rolling in the water and sand. All these things, the ruins of the sea, lying at different distances on the sand or half-buried in it, all of them seemed greater and more powerful than they were. They lay there, heavy and massive, like giants flung on the shore. And beyond this wide plain, more than a mile long, the North Sea opened its fearful mouth, white foam between its gnashing teeth. It flew up the shore, rising as high as a man, and leaping and roaring, and the surf stood there like a white, raging wall.

Ingeborg stood still, terrified anew at the sight and over-powered by the might of God. She looked across the water; there was no sail to be seen, nothing but the blue-black surface of the waves, moving restlessly to and fro. She went on thoughtfully, pressing slowly and laboriously against the wind. After half an hour she stood before the stormy surf, towering high above her. She was tired and sat down on the keel of the shipwrecked boat, not far from the stranded cask. The last day's storm had flung out into the sand a strong cable, which had been fastened to the stump of the mast. The waves played with it, and Ingeborg glanced at it thoughtfully.

Then she got up again to look for the sail. And there — she saw it just before her — a sail strained to breaking, the high side of a boat, leaping and springing and tearing over the waves as if flung forward by the hands of spirits, now low down so that the whole deck could be seen, and then leaping up on the water like a terrified sea-gull.

"Andrees!" she screamed, and, scarcely knowing what she did or why she did it, she caught the wet rope in her hand, and went into the water and coiled the rope together, trying to make it ready to throw — there, it rushed sideways — it crashed with a dull, heavy sound and struck three or four times on the sand, louder than the noise of the surf. The planks split, and the torn sail crackled against the wood and water. The figure of a man rose above her in the spray and mist holding on to a rope. She stretched out her hands to him, but the white, whirling water came, rose high against her, embraced her, and played with her hair. There was the brief terror of something great and unknown. Her senses vanished. She dreamt that she lay on the field at Flackelholm, protected by the surf and among the flowers, and Andrees Strandiger bent over her, and spoke of his passionate love and kissed her; but Franz Strandiger stood by and stretched his hand out against her and terrified her. The waves took no heed of her dream. With their thousand hands and their wild roar they snatched at her quivering body. But the man who had put his arm round her body held her fast with superhuman power, though his breath stood still and the rope wrung the blood from his hand. Just before them the wild shapes of the sea, stamping and raging, tore a puny human work to pieces, flung the split, torn fragments in each other's staring eyes and roared aloud.

They had been sitting in the boat for a long time, quite silent, Franz Strandiger in front leaning against the mast, with his feet planted on the deck, his hands in his pockets, and his short pipe between his teeth, the very picture of indifference. Only now and then he glanced across at Hoboken, who stood behind the wheel with a dismayed face. His arms had grown stiff and hurt him, but he was too vain to confess it or speak of returning.

To the east of Flackelholm a slender boat was crossing

the Dieksand. It must have drawn but little water, and have a centre-board in the keel which could be raised above shallow places. It was guided by some one who knew the Watt well. It steered towards Flackelholm with a small sail.

"That is his boat! Who else would be sailing towards Flackelholm?"

The wind swept the restless sea in roaring gusts. In the hollows of the waves it was twilight already, but on their summits was a grey, desolate light; sea-gulls flew past with their hoarse cries. The lighthouse at Neuwerk sent its first ray of light across the grey water; the little houses of Büsen had vanished on the horizon.

The old man held the wheel with trembling hands. If he would only say one word of returning, he thought. We cannot go back to Stülp now. We must find the way to Büsen; the night is coming.

"We must shorten sail," he called out.

Strandiger got up slowly and took hold of the sheet. He saw that the boat would not steer, but heeled over far on its side, and he turned round.

Hoboken's face was grey and distorted.

"I don't know," he said laboriously — "the chain has got fast — I cannot turn the wheel."

Strandiger slowly crossed aft, took the wheel and said carelessly: "Go forward."

The old man stumbled forward and took hold of the mast, his winking tear-filled eyes fixed on the steersman. At last he could endure no longer that quiet, proud face. The man who stood so upright at the wheel, looking across the water with such pride, had seen his fear and his old age.

"I will end my stay here — I — I have had enough. I must tell you one thing — you ought not to have undertaken a big estate when you had no money. But you counted on mine."

"Didn't you write to me that you would help me? Haven't you promised me from my childhood that you would help me sometime?"

"Did I say so?"

"I put the question to you!"

"Well, to cut it short, I will give you nothing. I need my money for myself."

They were both silent. The waves struck heavily against the boat. Before them there was something like a white streak running across the water which revealed a shallow. A high foaming wave rose over the ship and struck against the man by the mast so that he had to hold on; the water streamed down him.

"Steer straight," he cried out.

"Lower the sail," called Strandiger, "or we shall be on the Blausand."

The old man did it slowly and clumsily, with stiff hands and knees; the boat moved heavily to and fro. The wind seized fiercely on the loose sail and slatted it against the rope and the mast. The boat reared itself like a horse sinking down on its hind legs. There lay Flackelholm.

The boat came about and drove before the wind in the direction of the hut with its sail lowered, which showed black against the white dunes. Twilight lay on the water, only the dunes were still bright.

"So you will give me no money?"

"No."

"None at all?"

"No."

"Well — do you know then —"

He looked across to the hut. The flag was flying on the flagstaff. "In her honour." A figure came down the dunes and went towards the shore.

"How much money have you left?"

"What does that matter to you? You are steering wrong, keep more to the larboard! The wind is growing stronger! We shall get too near Flackelholm."

"Some one is walking on the shore. I want to see who it is."

The wind flung itself violently against the sail; a great white-crowned wave broke on the side and flung its water over the deck. Another came, rose higher, towered above them and stared with greedy eyes on the boat.

"Franz! This is dangerous — Flackelholm is too close."

"What should you think if I were going to pay you out to-day for all you have made me suffer the last twenty years?"

"Franz!" he cried.

He stood quietly at the wheel and looked at his uncle with a set face.

"Do you remember the cruel words you said to me the day I was confirmed? Do you know when I was only sixteen what sort of books you put on the table among my school books as if by accident — you scoundrel — and do you remember how, when I was seventeen, you took me into those vile dancing saloons?"

"Franz! Stop!"

His eyes were wide open, his lower jaw hung down; all at once his face had grown weak and old.

"Do you know what they say? They say that the shore at Flackelholm is as hard as stone. The boat will strike on it and be smashed in pieces just as you smash an empty cigar box with your fist —"

"You are mad. Oh, God! — if I were only on land!"

"You would like that — would you, you fine, proud fellow? With all your courage! The ribs of the boat will break like matchwood; will your ribs keep sound? But you are a handsome young fellow — you grey ape."

"You shall have everything."

"Ah — stupid! You have said that too often. You didn't keep your word. You said: 'Turn farmer! I will put all my money in your estate.' And now you would not give even four thousand marks and I have to go to the money-lender. Do you see, that is why I am going with you now to Flackelholm and its shore. Can you see the white edge? The waves are leaping there. We will soon see who shall have your money. We will cast lots for it — you and I and the devil. Three people. It will be settled in ten minutes."

"Franz! Dear Franz — let me live. I am an old man and have only a few years —"

"So you beg! Have you ever thought about death and what it would mean to you? What have you done in your life? What a hog does! Eaten and rolled in the dirt. Besides being a vain fool. All that will stop; it will be quite different! Who knows? Has one got a conscience for nothing, for nothing whatever? We have teeth for biting and fists for striking and legs for walking and a conscience to point the way. You can't walk on your hands and you shouldn't take the devil as your sign-post."

"Misery! Misery!"

"There you are. You won't be able to pay your dues either."

The old man flung himself down on the deck and tried with his frozen hands to loosen the rope that held the sail. The wind flew howling over the water.

Franz Strandiger looked towards the figure which was walking close by the surf. The white line before him grew plainer and whiter. It was time to turn round.

"You have been afraid! You have crawled before me, you coward."

The old man did not hear, the wind howled so loudly. He lay near the cordage, tearing and pulling; he bit into the hard rope with his teeth.

Then the figure on the shore vanished behind the surf. Strandiger sprang up. In an instant he was by the mast and thrust at the prostrate figure with his foot, but the old man did not understand; terror had utterly bewildered him. He cried aloud for help, and flung both arms round the rope. It was too late now.

Strandiger's face grew white, but not a muscle moved. He sprang to the wheel and put it down. "We will strike slantingly," he thought.

Behind the wind howled, on each side and before them there was nothing but the white whirling water, boiling and foaming. All round, now from this spot and now from that, the white eyes glared over the edge of the boat. Two minutes more — there was a shock, so violent and so fearful that Hoboken's body flew up and fell down again, and Franz seized his own hair with the hand he had stretched out to the prostrate man. Then the white arms of the waves reached out and dragged the unconscious man overboard.

Two more shocks! All round there was the wild, mad raging water, snatching at them with its thousand hands. He looked down below: there before him were two other hands — human hands. As swift as lightning he glided down by the rope; fortunately for him the boat, dashing and breaking in pieces as it was, still gave him a little protection; he caught the falling figure firmly, carried it up, and fell down on the shore with his burden. He had forgotten every one else. He knelt down before her, listened for her breath, drew

the wet, heavy dress over her feet, and looked at her fixedly with his dark, glowing eyes.

"Why did she go into the water? What must I think of it? Think? Think? What use is thinking? She is mine. My salvage! Mine! If we lived in the old days and I had rescued her from the water and from death—I would not have needed to ask her if she would be mine and she herself would not have doubted it, since she would have been my salvage. Think? I will keep fast what the sea has flung in my arms this moment; God and the old laws of the shore have spoken to me."

"Was some one speaking of conscience awhile ago?"

He leaned both hands on the sand. Her white unconscious face was just beneath him, her breath was feeble and laboured, there was water on her pale lips, and water flowing from her hair, whose braids lay spread out on the damp sand. She lay there quite defenceless.

"She is still in danger of death; she cannot even move her hands. Ingeborg—darling—say one word to me! Open your eyes! No, leave them as they are; if you opened them you would be terrified. Come—I will carry you home. When you are able to answer I will ask you—"

He knelt down quickly and lifted her up as some one might lift a frail child on a cushion, and carried her as quickly as he could across the sand, darkening in the twilight, in the direction of the hut. The surf roared behind him, and the storm shrieked for its lost booty. "She belongs to us, to us!"

"To us?" he said aloud. "Which of us? She must tell us herself. I will ask her again. She does love me; I saw it in her eyes! Ingeborg—"

Panting and laboriously he carried his burden up the dunes through the deep sand; he was weary to death, and staggered as he went. There was a light in the hut. He thrust the door open with his foot. There was no one in the hut but Andrees Strandiger and the red-headed man; they had just come from the boat and had no suspicion of Ingeborg's arrival. They sprang up when they saw the tall figure appear in the doorway, carrying his burden, and pale as death.

"What is that?" cried Andrees.

"My salvage!" he answered. "My salvage! I would tell you more but you are not alone. I have saved her from the

surf. She will tell you herself why she went in. I must leave her here now because she is ill —”

He laid her on the sheepskin which covered the floor.

The red-headed man bent over her, loosened her dress at the throat, and placed her head low.

“It is not because of the water,” he said; “she is fainting,” and he shook her by the arm. Andrees held her head in his hands and wiped the water from her face and hair. Then Franz Strandiger left the room and sat outside the hut on the bench. After awhile he got up and went back into the hut. In the bedroom adjoining the living-room was a light, and he went in. Andrees Strandiger was bending over the bed and Ingeborg clung to his shoulder with both arms as if she were still afraid of sinking in the surf. Wild, feverish sobs convulsed her body as she lay half-dressed on the bed.

“I thought it was you, then I recognized him, and fell back.”

“He saved you.”

“Andrees—dear Andrees! Help me! Don’t leave me! I am afraid of him.”

Franz Strandiger drew back from the threshold, went out and sat down again on the bench. The wind blew against him, and a fearful cold made his limbs tremble.

Soon afterwards the sailor came out, looked round, and saw him.

“I was right; it was just a faint. Now tell me how you came here, and what has happened? It makes one’s head whirl.”

“We were driven into the surf out there. We came too close, and the wind increased; we could not get the big sail down. My uncle must be there still, and the boat is in pieces by now.” He gathered the last remnants of his strength together. “You must take me to the mainland — now, at once. I will pay you. Come! you will come!” he said again.

The old man pushed his cap on one side. “The water is going down already.”

“Well then, you can drive me to the Strandigerhof.”

“Yes — that would be better. But not till after one. We must have moonlight or we can’t manage. But I remember now — Strandiger said that he was going to cross at the next ebb tide if it were possible. He wants to tell his mother about

the accident and bring some woman to help. The young lady can't recover at once — ”

“ I won't go with Strandiger — take me as far as the cross-stake; I can find my way from there alone.”

“ Well — that will do; will you come into the hut? ”

“ No! Where are the horses? ”

“ Here in the wooden hut! ”

He led him to the wooden hut which was feebly lighted by a stable lantern. There by the horses, to the left of the entrance, was a bed of straw; he lay down after he had put on one of the sailor's suits and drunk some hot coffee; he covered himself with a horse-cloth and fell asleep.

Antje Witt wandered along the shore close by the surf. Her brother had followed to look for her, but he had not found her. In Eschenwinkel, and in her brother's house, she controlled herself because she was afraid of frightening people and children. She tried to suppress the mad spirit in her, and her natural kindness made her nearly always succeed. But when she felt herself too deeply moved, she rushed out into the Watt and lived for days on Flackelholm. Here in solitude the uncanny fire would flare up. The poor mad spirit was restrained in Eschenwinkel by the neighbourhood of men, and by some remnant of reason, but in the loneliness of the island it shook off all control. What she did and thought in her madness in those hours and days no one had seen or heard. She had hidden herself from the three or four fishermen whom chance brought to Flackelholm. Some she had utterly terrified by appearing before them, but they had never recognized her. Of late years she had become more restless; she was now forty-three.

It was already late evening. The light from the Neuwerk lighthouse shone from the northwest over the white foam. It was high tide; the air seemed filled with roaring and rushing, and weeping and groaning.

They came up on black horses, straight forward, in long close lines, riders in white flowing mantles, with bright helmets, in roaring thundering gallop, always close together, in a long file; no one drew back and no one's horse fell. They rushed straight on, three, four, six rows of them issuing out of the darkness of the night, all tall and proud, on leaping

horses, with faces pale as snow — but when they came near, up on the shore, the horses fell down to their knees, the white faces and the bright helmets were tossed on the sand, the long mantles lay on the ground, and the foam ran over the sand, bright in the moonlight.

She wandered along the surf, farther and farther.

“Shall I find him this time?” she thought. “They had white mantles and beautiful dark horses. I heard Reimer say so when he came back. They rushed up, one rank after another, and all fell down in a heap. I shall find him here. I have come here many years, always close to the horses, and in the flood. I have already found and buried many dead people but he was not among them. People say, ‘In the last twenty years there have been no more dead bodies found on Flackelholm.’ I have been here, I, and buried them. They looked wretched, they were all trodden down by the hoofs, they had been lying weeks in the wild battle. I said a prayer over each sandy mound.

“Heinrich!

“How the cannon roar! I am a poor creature alone in the battle. Tell me where his regiment is? I have forgotten the number; it is such a long time ago, more than twenty years. I have to run and run here, and I am growing old and am very tired. When I can do it no more, who will look for him then? Who will bury him then?”

She hastened on, struggling laboriously against the wind, and then — she came to a spot where the shore curved and the sea raged most wildly; great pieces of earth had been torn out of the shore, and in the midst of the surf the wild waves were playing with the remnant of a boat, roaring with pride and tossing it to and fro; a man lay stretched out there, still and dead, his face shattered and covered with blood. He wore high boots and a blue suit of a military cut. He looked quite different from the others she had buried.

“Heinrich!”

The moon stood in the sky and saw how that very hour she buried the dead a little higher up the sandy wall, as she had buried more than thirty others — but with more heartfelt prayers. She returned home about midnight, and spent the rest of the night sitting quietly and still by the window of the room and watching Ingeborg’s restless sleep. She had

combed her hair carefully — with a wet comb as usual — and put on a black cloth bodice with a collar round her neck. She had her hymn-book in her hand ; on it lay a white hand-kerchief, carefully folded. So Felix Hoboken, who had never in his life done good to a single human being, was buried with warm tears and prayers. He had to be cast ashore on Flackelholm for that to happen to him.

The cart stopped by the cross-stake. The moon was still in the sky, but driving clouds covered it from time to time. On the eastern horizon dark clouds were massing together like a black wall against the day. In the west also heavy masses of cloud lay above the sea. It was low tide.

"I don't like leaving you here," the red-bearded man said. "The way is difficult. I can guide myself by the stars, but you do not know how."

"It will soon be morning. I know the direction, and I shall be able to recognize the Priel."

"It may get darker. I don't like those clouds in the west, and the air is oppressive."

"Go back again. I shall get home all right."

The red-haired man shook his head ; then he began to point out the way.

"For three-quarters of an hour by your watch, you will go in that direction. Do you see the star there? Then you will come to the quicksand ; go round it like this — "

"I know the way, I have gone after ducks."

He stepped down heavily from the cart, which turned and went back in the tracks it had made. Then Strandiger looked round again.

"Will Andrees Strandiger himself drive to the Koog?"

"Yes. To-day or to-morrow. Reimer and I have to go to Büsen for more stones."

The cart clattered on and rattled away ; then everything was silent on the desolate waste. The sky had drawn off its veil of cloud, and the stars looked with their thousand open eyes. He turned slowly round. His limbs trembled, and he was shaken by the cold of the morning ; he looked towards the star which showed his way, and made a hundred slow steps, then he stood still and glanced back at the stake. He saw it plainly standing out against the sky.

"I must go by my watch," he thought. "My watch has stopped; the water has got in. My heart stops too; grief and anger have got in. Because I saw what happened in that room."

He went on awhile and came to a smaller stake, a little more than a man's height, and stood before it.

"I will take it out of the ground, and put it two hundred paces to the side—if my watch has stopped, why should his go?"

He stood still and brooded. From the west there was heard low rolling thunder, swelling as it came; it came threateningly from the sky as if some one were striking on the vault.

"If we both get to the Strandigerhof without our sign-posts, she shall belong to him."

He returned slowly, with black gloomy thoughts. His features were now neither beautiful nor proud. His face was changed as if he had associated for years with coarse people.

"It is a test; this shall decide it. The one who gets through shall have the bride. If we both get through I will give way. The woman! The proud, beautiful woman!"

He tore at the stake, and his great strength dragged it loose. There was a clucking sound; the water which had been asleep under the mud woke up and filled the hollow with a gurgling noise. He carried the stake sideways; two hundred paces away was a little watercourse, and he threw it in. Then he returned to the other stake. At first he could not find it; then, when he found it, he carried it to the other side, and his thoughts took him farther than he had meant to go. He carried it four hundred paces.

"Now we have neither of us any guide-posts." He looked up at the star and went on.

"She was in my hands when she lay there. She was mine. God or destiny—no matter which—had given her to me. Then, fool as I was, I took her to him. When I carried her in, when I took her to him, I was free and proud. Now—" He passed his cold hand over his face. "It is just as if everything were drawn and distorted."

He stood still again and listened to the thunder which came from the west, and then he turned round and looked

at the clouds. The thunder rolled over the endless wide space; he bent his head and listened.

"A thunder-storm in March — and just to-day. It looked like it all day — as if some one were calling to me. Stop your cursing and threatening. I am coming. I will put them in again where they used to be. I know the Watt in this part better than he does; it is not fair. It is hard to be drowned like that, and he was my friend once; he does not know the way as well as I do. Now I shall feel better again — very soon. I will look for the posts! Where are they?"

He ran some distance — then he sank in. He turned to the west, found the stream and ran along, looking for the stake, but he could not find it. He went on again and found it in the fork of the stream, which divided just there, and did not realize the changed direction. Again he sank ankle-deep in the mud. Then he looked in the sky for the star which was to point out his way, but it was not there. The black storm had received its command and pressed upon him. He looked round. He no longer knew which way to turn. He followed his own footsteps — they crossed each other and were confused. He came to a stream in which the water was rushing and gurgling, and sank in. He turned round; turned again. Then he knew that he was lost. Lost in the Watt!

The storm came down slowly, an uncanny thing in that fearful desolation. In the west was a monstrous shape which covered the whole horizon, like a giant on the sea. Another was above him and seemed to be crouched together on its knees. The two fought together with glowing arrows and spears which showed in zigzag lines. The upper one was struck by a tremendous blow. He drew himself up with a thundering roar, for he was terribly wounded and his entrails hung down into the sea.

The tide came, and in his deadly need the lost man searched for the way, but could not find it. He knew no longer which was east or west. At last he stood still where the ground was firm.

"What good would it be to run away? If a flash of lightning should strike me!"

The poor human being stood there in the monstrous Watt; his strong limbs were trembling, the light of his eyes was quenched, his proud heart had lost its courage, and his whole

strength was gone. If he could only have waited for death in battle — with many others — but he was quite alone. He was the last man on earth, facing death and annihilation; no, not death only, but eternity. He was quite alone.

The water rose to his ankles. Still further! Every wave brought more and every footstep gushed like a spring. It was grey, grey everywhere. Even the bank of shells on which he was standing and which had seemed so white before, was running with water. Above, below, to the west and the east, nothing but water, water and the peril of death.

Then he pulled himself together again. He thought the mainland must lie in that direction. He did not know how he got the idea, but his fancy seized on it; it drew him that way. But when he had taken a few steps it was quite plain to him that he was going wrong, and he stood still again. After awhile — he might have been standing about half an hour — he tried once more, splashing heavily through the water in the direction where he thought the surface was higher and firmer. He had given up the idea of finding the land. Then he stumbled over a large piece of wood. It was the stake lying there. He broke off a portion as tall as himself, and supported himself on it and clung to it so that the ever flowing water should not make him giddy. At last he could no longer bear to look at the motion of the water or he would have fallen in. Then he glanced upwards and stood like one who was praying or as if he were listening to some one speaking from above.

In the west, high above the sea, cracking iron doors were opened, chains and stakes clanged at the porch, and iron surfaces echoed harshly. Through the stone passages rolled iron wagons, several of them, one behind another, and the vaulted roofs reechoed the furious noise. Black steeds appeared, whose iron hoofs struck on the hard stone, then there was a blinding flash, a dazzling blue light, the clouds parted before Him and a thousand hands flung out the rain so that His horses should not fall. An unseen giant stood on the horizon below the sea, and threw fire from both his hands across the sky so that they could find the way.

"How long have I been standing here? An hour? Or a year? My head says an hour, but my heart feels as if it were a year. All the things that come one after another in

time lie piled up in the heart. I have seen again everything I have thought and done from my childhood. There is nothing more left. The torture may end now."

The big stake bent here and there as the waves swung his body to and fro. The broken end of the stake which he had pressed against his breast had forced its way through his clothes, and blood was running down the grey bark, but he did not notice it.

"I am not guilty of your death! I would have honoured you as thousands of others honour their wives. Why did you go into the pool? Leave me alone with that saintly face of yours! Stay under your white gravestone. What do you want in the dreadful Watt?

"I did not want to kill him. I swear by God I did not mean to. I thought there was still time, but he was in such deadly terror and he held the rope so fast. He held it as fast as I hold this wretched stake now. But I am better off than he was. I can still think over everything. He had not much time. He had only heard a short sermon — from me. That conscience is meant for something — like feet and hands. Now I am giving a sermon to myself — a long, long one — and it never comes to an end. I reckon up whole columns and I cannot draw the line underneath. Cannot? Will not. It is miserable! There must be a mistake somewhere, or else I could die now. There must be something else I have not thought of. What can it be? Everything is in confusion — swimming and tossing up and down. Everything I think of is like the water, gurgling and whirling and pathless. Neither my heart nor my soul know where it comes from nor where it is going. Now it all grows quiet — as God wills. What does that mean? Is it God's will that I should be tortured and drowned here in this wretched way?

"Why not? He calls me to the other world. And it is this way, exactly *this* way which is the best for me — and this place. I also showed little mercy. I gripped people, men and women, firmly and harshly; it is what He is doing now with me. I must thank Him for that; there is sense in it.

"It will be some time yet — the water isn't up to my waist. My legs are dead. My heart will be dead soon. The clouds are going away; it is getting lighter; there is a pale

light in the sky; the last day! I will look once more to the Strandigerhof if I can, and once again to Flackelholm, where she is. Ah, what good will that do? I ought to look somewhere else, and think what my reception will be there. To be up to one's middle in water alters everything. The earth is turned to water and the heaven is firm land, and what used to be little has become great, very great. What wouldn't thrive on the land has grown quickly in the water. I should not have believed anything of this. I should have thought I would perish just like a fly in milk if I had not known Maria Landt. I have no natural tendency to humility. Humility! They say, we are *not* humble like other men. Other men, they say, fear sin and guilt, misfortune and death; of all that we have no fear. We fear only God. And it is beautiful, they say, to fear God. There is truth in it. Christians believe in the light, the others in the darkness. But how shall I believe in the light in this grief and horror of death."

Sea-gulls flew screaming past, settled down, and cradled themselves on the waves. "Wretched birds. They can live while I die." Seals came from the distance, raised their white bodies and looked at him. "Leave me alone. Go to Flackelholm and tell her. I can bear it no longer. My knees are giving way, and my eyes are darkened and my mind is wandering. It goes back to my youth, and roams about and rages. I am the colonel. Let us gallop. It is the day of Gravelotte and my father is dying. He died for the fatherland. I — as a criminal. My mother was not God-fearing. Now I seem to knock at the gate of heaven. Listen! The knocking sounds. Poor soul."

The last thunder died away; the day began to break. "That is the land there, so near me, and yet so far away."

The dawn thrust its golden hands through the clouds, and looked across the waves with its long, fiery eyes. "Now it is enough."

A voice came from behind, calling loud, clearer than the thousand voices of the waves —

"Franz, stand firm! I am coming!"

He turned round, waving his arms. Andrees Strandiger stood in the bottom of the cart, with his legs stretched out, the whip in his hand. The great brown horses were going slowly through the water, snorting and tossing their heads,

which they held high; the yokes were clattering, the end of the shaft rose out of the water every now and then; the waves covered the floor of the cart.

“I am coming; keep steady, my boy, a minute more.”

He stood and stared at the horses with great wild eyes; he did not even try to make his face express pride or sternness; he reached out both hands to the horses’ heads, and worked himself sideways along the cart, holding to the traces, and got up between the sides on his knees.

“Let us go away,” he said. “Away from this fearful place.”

“Yes—where?” said Andrees.

“We shall perish here.”

“I hope not. If the cart holds out, and the horses keep firm, and the water doesn’t get too high.”

“Where did you come from?” groaned Franz.

“The road is up there. I couldn’t find the cross stake; then I lost my way. I found it again after, and I think I should have got to land by now, but I saw you—you, poor fellow. I will take off my coat; cover your breast with it; it is all over blood. Wrap it round you. To be shipwrecked twice on one day. No human being can bear that.”

Franz tried to raise himself from his knees, but he sank back again.

“I will tell you. It was I who took out the stake, because I wanted to cast lots with you for Ingeborg Landt. Afterwards I tried to put it back, but I got lost.”

Andrees drew himself up; a wild excitement made his whole figure tremble.

“That is for God,” he said, “not for me. I have to carry my own burden.”

“Now you come and want to help me, and you will perish too, and everything is over, and I have done it all—I am cold and exhausted.” He laid his head against the side of the cart and wept.

“I will stand like this,” said Andrees. “Stay on your knees and keep close to me, then you will get warm. If the horses are restless I will cut them loose, but I hope the water won’t come much higher. And the horses are clever; they will stand quiet. Three hours of the flood-tide have gone.”

So they remained there, those enemies, as close as possible.

They spoke but little, and not often. They listened to the low, rushing sound of the water and the clattering of the shafts. They watched the horses, who held their heads up and turned round with terrified eyes. They looked across to the Strandigerhof.

When the water fell Franz Strandiger was asleep, sinking together with his arm across Andrees's knees, and his head and shoulder leaning against the side of the cart. The sun rose radiant in the east; it was a lovely, bright spring morning. To the northeast appeared the long, white ridge of a sand-bank, which immediately became a place of refuge for hundreds of birds. Then they set out. They were noticed almost at once. Carts and riders rushed down the dyke. Heim Heiderieter received them, looking at them with wide, anxious eyes, and standing waist-deep in the water. Franz Strandiger totally collapsed.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning — it was stormy March weather — Andrees Strandiger came across from the churchyard to the Heidehof. He had taken a slight cold, but otherwise the hours in the Watt had done him no harm. About noon he wished to return to Flackelholm. He said briefly that he had had a conversation with Franz, and that they had determined to try and get on with each other like cousins.

“I hope,” said Heim, “that after this affair he will give up the lease.”

“He said something of the kind, but I don’t want to discuss it now because he is physically so broken. He cannot put his feet to the ground and has severe pains.”

“What do you intend to do?”

“I shall go back to Flackelholm, build a house and get married.”

“Very good,” said Heim, and Eva nodded.

“I should be glad,” said Andrees, “if you could come back with me to the Strandigerhof and visit him; I think it would please him. He said you had not spoken a word to him the whole of this winter, and that you had quite obviously avoided him.”

“How can I go to him,” said Heim, “when he has ruined the whole of Eschenwinkel?”

“He told me that he had had very little friendship in his life, not even here at home, not even from you. Will you come with me? Then the three comrades will be together once more.”

Heim turned round. “Eva! bring me my Sunday coat. Since that day I went with you across the heath I have not had such a delightful walk as this will be.”

Andrees looked after him. “He is happy! He has just the work which suits him — farmer and author.”

Eva laughed. “The farmer is a doubtful matter; I am

the farmer, but still I am very happy. You see, Andrees, many men give up when they are married. Before, they have their heads full of plans; they mean to do a lot; but afterwards, when they have their wife and their children, they think they have done enough, and they turn commonplace or tedious or even disagreeable."

"I will lay it to heart."

"I beg your pardon. But Heim — Heim has grown more industrious. He is writing now."

She pointed to the writing-table; the big yellow volumes were still there, but they were arranged in rows, as if their work were done, and she said —

"He has studied the early history of the country with the greatest industry; you know he has real talent for languages and history. Neighbour Haller has helped him with the Danish, but he can read it very well now. And now, with all his reading and reading, his pictures of the old time have become really alive; the dead men have opened their eyes, the villages and the heaths are busy with people awakened from their long sleep."

"There is something almost uncanny in such a gift."

Eva nodded. Then she raised her head with animation. "But now we have talked enough of that, Herr Strandiger; we must speak of something else."

He looked at her questioningly. "Of Ingeborg?"

"Yes! of Ingeborg!"

"Ingeborg," he said slowly, "was not entirely free from Franz, even after she had withstood him so boldly on the heath. He is a Strandiger as much as I, and like me in many things; he is even more impetuous than I, and more a man of the world, and handsomer. That accounts for it. But now she is entirely mine, all hesitation is over with both of us; we are to be married in June."

"You will live on Flackelholm?"

"Yes, at least for this summer. That will be good for me, for Ingeborg and for Flackelholm; afterwards something else will turn up for us. Reimer Witt has a great idea of being my agent on Flackelholm, but his wife doesn't want to, and it would make difficulties with the children's schooling."

"Well, so much for that! Isn't there anything else you

have to say, or to ask, or perhaps to see? It is five months since you have been in our house."

He looked at her smiling face in some bewilderment. Then at last he bethought himself.

"Ah, the boy! Your first-born. Forgive me!"

"It is difficult to forgive, Herr Strandiger, but still I will show you the child."

As she left the room Heim appeared, in such haste that he carried his coat in his hand.

"Come with me," he said, and led him into the long room by the window.

The coach from the Hof, laden with boxes, was driving up the rain-drenched Sandway. The old Hoboken was the only person inside. She was taking her departure. By the schoolhouse wall ten or twelve children stood in a row, careless of the March rain which trickled down from the thatched roof and wetted their slippers and shoes. They looked at each other and gradually, as their courage grew, and the carriage moved on, they broke up their line and called out —

"No pity! No pity! She's going. Now we can sing: 'Lieb Faterland, magst ruhig sein.'"

Heim laughed and his face beamed. He could, alas! still take pleasure in such stupid, childish pranks, but Andrees looked very grave.

On the third of April, when the weather permitted, they began to build the house. It stands at the foot of the dunes, in their shelter, and close to the round watering-place for the sheep. Below, on the ground floor, are four apartments — the hall, the kitchen, and two other rooms; above are two rooms. The rest of the building is meant for the cattle. Below is a large stable, like a threshing-floor, paved with clay that has been stamped hard, and above is a room for winter fodder. It is firmly built, the foundations are laid in cement, with strong walls, ten inches thick, small windows, and a heavy, gabled roof. It is just the opposite of a summer house. Round the house and the watering-place, in a circle which enclosed about an acre of land, they built a dyke, a so-called ring dyke, sixteen or eighteen feet high, with a massive broad base, especially towards the shore; the body of the dyke was made from the firm earth found near the dead water. In order to give it

a strong covering square sods were cut out of the field, thickly overgrown with the wiry grass; they were cut out neatly and laid close together. In the first month the horizontal and cross lines could still be seen where the sods had been cut, but in the summer they soon disappeared, the grass sprouted and the sods grew together, and made a green, strong garment.

Forty men worked for two and a half months. They were workmen belonging to the country, for the most part people who were accustomed to work on the "foreland." Andrees Strandiger ruled them vigorously, but was greatly beloved, since, though he was sparing in words, and a bit "pedantic," as they said at times, he was just and never demanded more than a man could perform; they felt, too, that he meant well by them. He made sure that they had good food and looked carefully after the postal orders they gave him for their wives and children in Büsen; they counted it also as greatly to his credit that he would have no "schnapps" on the island, but good coffee which Antje prepared and which was placed at their disposal free of charge. At times, on rainy days, the work was unpleasant and difficult. When at such times they felt lonely or longed for their wives, then gloom reigned over Flackelholm, but many evenings were quiet and pleasant and happy songs would sound from the dunes. It was in those months and while working on that particular spot that the temperance movement first began in the neighbourhood. Among the workmen were some from the districts of Eiderstedt and Tondern, who drank no spirits. At first they were laughed at a good deal, but not for long. Antje's coffee-stall, which was greatly appreciated, did the rest. In June, when Christoph Dwenger returned to the village he founded the first lodge of Good Templars in the neighbourhood.

By the tenth of June, the anniversary of Friedrich Strandiger's death, the house and dyke were finished. Since there were no leaves on the island, Christoph Dwenger made a garland of the yellow oat grass on the shore and hung it on the pole projecting from the roof.

In the early morning five carts came through the Watt from Eschenwinkel.

Heim drove the first and Eva and Ingeborg sat by him. Behind them on the second seat Reimer and Telsche Spieker and Bertha Witt. The second was driven by Commissioner

Möller, who owned a large house in Koog not far from the dyke, and whose interests had been all his life in the dykes and Watts. Haller sat by him, his short pipe in his mouth; he discussed in a clever and well-read way the natural history of the Watt and disputed with the Commissioner, who considered everything from the point of view of pure utility. Anna Haller sat behind them looking with some apprehension over the wide, desolate space. At first she had not wanted to go, for she was no heroine, though she tried to look like one. However, when she heard that the new pastor was going she decided that she would go too. She sat by him now on the seat; he was a clever man and knew a good deal of the world — he had been curate for some time in a large city — and he wondered why he felt so much at home when he talked to his little seventeen-year-old neighbour. He had known her for some months, but he decided now that he would go oftener into the schoolhouse. It was cheerful there and the vicarage was large and empty; his mother was a cabinet-maker's wife and she had told him: "If possible, Hans, think of us. Take your wife from a homely family, so that I sha'n't be afraid when I come to visit you."

Christian Möller drove the third cart. He was the son of Frau Möller of Mönchshof, and owned the estate on the Witten Knee. Heim had asked him to go with them. Although he was somewhat younger he had been very friendly with both Heim and Andrees at the grammar school. His wife sat by him. She had fair hair and eyes as full of curiosity as a child's. Peter Nahwer and Pellwormer lay behind them on the straw. They wished to make acquaintance with this new country, for though they had lived more than forty years in Eschenwinkel they had never seen Flackelholm. Their conversation was difficult and slow, for Pellwormer, who was greatly excited by such a journey, stuttered worse than ever, and Peter Nahwer had to puff vigorously at his pipe, for they were going against the wind. Although he had only a cold smoke now he did it in just the way he had done when it was warm; he gave long and short pulls according to his mood, he drew up his mouth and closed his eyes a little as if he were puffing out the smoke, and he always drew more strongly against the wind; yes, it was even said that when he was alone in his workshop he hung his pipe on the nail

with the words: "One can have too much of a good thing." After some vain attempts to say what he had at heart, Pellwormer drew a letter from his pocket and held it before his friend's eyes. The latter tried to read without spectacles.

Christian Möller had begun a merry dispute with his wife; she argued against him in her clear voice; the cart clattered; half-words, broken words and low tones came from the straw; now and then Peter Nahwer could read a word and now and then Pellwormer could say one. It was a letter from the widow Thiel in California.

The fourth and fifth carts were filled with women from Eschenwinkel and the village; women whose husbands were just finishing their work at Flackelholm. The first was driven by William Rohde, who sat by his mother. He was Franz Strandiger's head man and Franz had lent him the cart. He had looked grim enough when he did it. "If you want to see the merrymaking at Flackelholm you can take one of the big carts. Fill it with the women who want to go, and take care that you keep with the others." Then he had turned away shortly.

They were speaking of Franz Strandiger.

"Yes, he is quite changed."

"One could be sorry for him; I don't think he will ever be quite right again."

"Six hours in the cold water in March; that is no joke."

"He is going soon to Hamburg for a whole month to take hot baths for his feet."

"Has he been summoned before the Board of Trade — because of the shipwreck?"

"No! That is put off till he has recovered."

"Well — it is only a matter of form. The weather was stormy and they were driven on Flackelholm. That's all there is in it."

So it was that the five carts made their long journey through the Watt. The sun shone; the wet earth glittered far and wide; great flocks of sea-gulls were out on their feeding-grounds. When they caught sight of the green land and the white lines of dunes, and in their shelter the round dyke and the flag above the red roof, there was great excitement; they went through the Dieksander Gatt with loud outcries, and on the other side many got down from the carts. Some women

ventured to take off their shoes and stockings. They walked on, crossing the bright shore. The sturgeon fishers, whose boats were in the distance, made signals to the women and shouted to them, but the distance was too great and the words were lost in the water. There was nothing to regret in that.

The men from Flackelholm came slowly down the dyke to meet the carts and greeted the newcomers with a certain dignity. There was something so calm and decisive about Christoph Dwenger that his wife took him by the arm, drew him aside and said —

“What is the matter, Christoph? You have not asked after the children?”

He told her everything; his long abstinence, how much pleasure he had found in it, and his resolution. She listened gravely; then she looked up at him, her face bright with happiness, took his arm and went back with him to the others, carrying her head high for the first time in many years.

Andrees had lifted Ingeborg down from the cart. He went to the house with her and into the room; he took her in his arms and caressed and kissed her. She clung to him without uttering a word, but she did not try to repress the happiness in her eyes now.

Antje could not be prevailed upon to leave her place behind the coffee-table and come and see the carts arrive. She felt too strongly the importance of her office. She was the proudest and happiest of all. They had their coffee and took thick bread and butter and cold meat and pickled eggs; then they went for a long walk on the shore and back over the field. Andrees and Ingeborg walked beside Commissioner Möller; many clever things were said and many plans discussed. Christian Möller walked beside Eva and told her, though interrupted by many lively protests from his wife, the story of his betrothal to the sometime *Frauke Knee*. Just behind them walked Heim and *Frauke*, carrying on a merry conversation.

“We suit one another,” said the lively young wife. “Christian, I should suit Herr Heiderieter much better than do you!”

“That is no compliment to Heim.”

“Oh, dear! He is always like that, Frau Heiderieter.”

After the long walk Reimer brought out the cask of brown beer on to the earthen floor and told how the “distiller” —

a fine word — had said in the town that he had not got a single groschen from Flackelholm. He had mocked and blamed the Good Templars; “I lose a hundred marks income,” he said, “for every man whom these people persuade to give up spirits.” The audience laughed and were pleased, and the women especially looked happy.

When all the glasses were filled, Heim Heiderieter, to Antje’s helpless bewilderment, mounted on her coffee-table, struck his breast, and made the following speech —

“ Dear friends and comrades. It is an old and a good custom to consecrate a new house with a garland and a speech. The garland which Christoph has made of oat-grass ” — Christoph flushed with pleasure — “ is in its place; permit me to make the speech. In the old, old days, my friends, the place where we are standing now was once firm land; men lived on it but it sank down in darkness and horror; the wild waves buried the fields, the houses, and the people. It was so once with the freedom of our nation. That, too, went down in darkness and horror. The dykes which our fathers made with their bodies at Bornhöved and Hemmingstedt and many other places could hold out no longer. The Danish tide came in, it poured farther and farther into the land and grew more and more terrible until at Ibstedt all was lost.

“ There came a wretched time. We were a people without rights and without honour — a disgraced nation. The whip was held over you, Schleswig-Holstein. Our misery was boundless and measureless, for we had fought and struggled seven hundred years. Our nation was accustomed to freedom, and they bound both its hands; it was like cutting the wings from a pair of those sea-gulls that fly over the wild Watt. We gnashed our teeth in rage, we lifted up our chained hands and cried to Mother Germania.

“ And as they looked across to her the time came when she of whom they had dreamed so often lifted her radiant eyes and saw her children’s misery and called them to battle. In those years this island of Flackelholm rose out of the sea. It grew greater and our hope with it. A green field formed itself, and our hope also became a green field.

“ It did not come about without sacrifices. Düppel, Verneville — Antje, you know it.” Antje’s eyes flamed suddenly. “ The field on Flackelholm also cost men’s lives. It is thirty

years ago to-day since Friedrich Strandiger remained in the wild Watt.

"My friends! For a time there was desolation in the fatherland. We quarrelled like unhappy children shut up in one room; many lay on the threshold of the stately house, sunning themselves in idleness. The trenches in Flackelholm were choked up and the barren sand of the dunes was blown over the green land for years. But then we roused ourselves; we found our house too narrow, we tore open the door, we stepped on to the threshold and looked out into the world which was just being divided. Then Andrees Strandiger remembered this island and became a colonist and went out with his people and took possession of this—the youngest island of the German fatherland.

"My friends! We hope that the same kind of work that is being done here, courageous and active work, will be done along the whole line from Flackelholm to Sylt and Röm. We want to bind the sea, the terrible raging sea that buried our fathers. And therefore I bid you drink the health of all, from the highest commissioner in the castle at Berlin, and all his officials who look after the dykes and the 'forelands' and the Watts and the halligs, down to the humblest workman who steps into the mud, spade in hand; and the health, too, of those who will live here in this strong house.

"Hoch, hoch!"

There was a mighty thundering shout from the throats of the men. After silence had been restored he spoke again, briefly, with mischief in his face—

"Dear companions. My wife, who is rightly named Eva, said to me: 'If you have a celebration on Flackelholm you must invite the women; for a festival without women is like a flower without perfume.' So we invited the women, and are not sorry we did. We have recognized once again that it is only man and woman together who make a complete human being, and we pity some of our oldest friends, who have remained halves, and some of our young ones who are still halves" — Peter Nahwer, in his horror, forgot his pipe — "but we have two among us, two halves who suit each other and will soon be joined: Andrees Strandiger and beautiful Ingeborg, his betrothed; their health."

"Hoch — hoch!"

Clear and sweet sounded the women's voices.

Later on — it was about four o'clock — some of the women asked that the benches and tables might be carried out of the long room and they danced. Dancing was difficult, for the men wore their strong, high boots; the earthen floor thundered with their heavy tread. The beer had got into the heads of Peter Nahwer and of Pellwormer, the skilled in song, and they sang old dance songs, "Goes op de Deel," and others. When Heim entered to remind them that it was time to go he found Antje Witt standing before her geese with terrified eyes and guarding them with her apron spread out; they had got in a corner of the barn and were crouching behind a light partition; Pellwormer was extracting a piece of dried mud from his collar that had been flung there by one of the dancer's heavy boots.

When the tide went down the five carts left and arrived on the mainland safely before it was dark.

A fortnight later, on a quiet day in June — Franz Strandiger was still in Hamburg — there was a wedding at the Strandigerhof. The blind woman sat in her armchair close to the two who stood before the altar. She sat with her head bent forward and a peaceful expression on her narrow face and listened to the simple words of the young pastor. Afterwards, when the guests had left the room, Ingeborg knelt down before the chair and hid her fair head in the old lady's lap.

At table there was happy, but quiet conversation. Haller talked to Frau Strandiger of the past; her trembling hand felt for his and held it firmly; he had gone through everything with her. Andrees rose, and in three brief sentences thanked them for all the kindness and loyalty that had been shown to him in his day. Heim had intended to say something about the three comrades, but thought it perhaps best not to. He began to tease Anna Haller, who sat by the pastor, and, naturally, carried it too far. Glances and whispers were exchanged round the table. At last Anna Haller threw a tearful glance at Heim and ran into Mother Strandiger's room, and the pastor brought her back after Ingeborg had comforted her. The afternoon post brought several letters of congratulation and, in addition, one from Franz Strandiger,

in which he said that the trouble in his foot would compel him to give up the lease of the Strandigerhof in the autumn. He said further that he intended to make over his uncle's property, which was only some thirty thousand marks, entirely to his sister. When Andrees had put the letter in his wife's hand he saw before him an official envelope with the seal of the King's Council. Andrees Strandiger was summoned to appear as a witness concerning the shipwreck of the pleasure yacht *Felix*, in which Felix Hobooken was drowned. There was good cause to suspect that Hobooken's companion — Franz Strandiger — had been guilty of negligence.

Heim came up when Andrees made a sign to him and looked thoughtfully at the letter.

"He has been too proud to excuse himself," he said. "He could have done so easily, but lying is not his way."

They determined to keep silence about the matter for awhile.

"I will write to him," said Andrees, "to ask him how he stands with regard to this accusation and what plans he has."

About three o'clock in the afternoon Andrees and Ingeborg took leave of their mother. Andrees was able to tell her now that they would both be returning in the autumn, or perhaps even sooner. They had a fortunate crossing from the Stülpnerpriel, and that evening, when the newly married pair stood side by side on the dyke and saw the sinking sun stretch a long golden bridge across the sea to them, they felt as if they stood alone before the open eyes of God. Their lips closed and their eyes grew quiet; they thought of the past.

"You have quite changed, Andrees," said Ingeborg, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"I have gone through a great deal of sorrow."

After awhile he said: "It is that which has made me another man."

"You are quieter but happier too."

"Yes, I used to have a certain silly idea of 'enjoying life,' as people say. A barren enjoyment! And now I have the will to do something; that is the difference, Ingeborg."

She leaned nearer to him. "Come," she said, after awhile. "It is growing cool."

They went down the slanting way from the dyke. Antje

Witt came towards them to look after the sheep which were grazing on the green land. When the two stepped from the barn into the first room, which was furnished in a simple and homely way — the door of the second room stood open — Ingeborg flung herself on his breast overwhelmed by her passionate love.

In the autumn Franz returned to the Strandigerhof — after he had suffered some months' imprisonment — to give the lease up to Heim. That summer the Hof had been managed in the old way by old Hans Stüben, who had been overseer for many years under Frau Strandiger.

Heim went at once to the Hof.

Franz Strandiger looked fairly well, but he walked with difficulty, as if he had irons on his feet.

"Good morning, Franz," said Heim. "My wife sends her good wishes."

"I don't know," said Franz, in irritation, "how you came to get such a clever wife. I always thought that when you married you would make a stupid choice."

"Thank you," said Heim cheerfully; "I will tell my wife so. You look well. I am glad that you have recovered so far."

Franz laughed bitterly. "Recovered? If I walk quietly for two hours my feet swell."

"Well — you will get all right by degrees, body and soul."

"It doesn't look like it. I don't know what to do with my body or my soul either. It is so easy for you, you have an inheritance on earth and one in heaven too."

"Well said," cried Heim. "You have spoken well, my boy. I am here for the sake of the inheritance on earth; as for the inheritance in heaven, that is your own affair. Andrees commissions me to ask what plans you have."

"Plans?"

"Yes!"

Then Franz sat down heavily, and could not hide his despair, however much he tried to restrain himself.

"I have no plans!"

"Tell me, are you determined to go away from here?"

"Can I stay? Am I to become a steward? For you or for Andrees? It's true that I'm not as strong as I used to

be. When any one has gone through what I have—but I can't do that."

Heim shook his head. "You are excited," he said. "Listen! Just see! The three of us, we comrades, were away and had forgotten our home, but our road led us all back. When we returned, both Andrees and I got to love our home again; it took our hearts by storm. Now we have become workers for its sake; I dig out its old histories and use my strength on its heath; Andrees has already worked on Flackelholm for more than a year, and achieved a great deal. Now I ask you, the third of the comrades, are you going to leave your home and go away yet again?"

Strandiger rose and went to the window and looked out. The west wind rustled in the elms.

"I should like to stay here," he said at last. "I have had some experiences here which have gone very deep, and twice over I have suffered the utmost extremity in the sea."

Heim stood up and advanced quickly towards him. "Andrees wishes me to ask you if you will live on Flackelholm and manage the island for him."

Franz did not turn round and was silent for awhile.

"A nice idea," he said grimly. "Banishment! To Flackelholm with the dangerous fellow."

"Well, well," grumbled Heim, "the roads here in the old land are too narrow for you, and the men who walk in them want more deference than you care to give. You ought to have a large roomy estate, but you have not got one. Or else you ought to emigrate to West Africa; but you can't do that because of your feet. What is left then? Flackelholm. There are no roads there and no men. You will lead your life exactly as you please. When you want you will kill a sheep and make merry with your companions, and again, when it suits you, you will mount on the dyke and look across to the elms of the Strandigerhof, and again, when you please, you will visit your friend Heim Heiderieter."

"I should take good care not to."

"Well! I said if you pleased."

He walked to and fro for awhile. At last he said laboriously—

"He mustn't be always dictating to me. I won't give him an account for every stroke of the spade."

"No! He would give you a free hand. You would undertake to direct the work in the Watt for ten years according to certain plans. In return for that superintendence you would receive the whole produce of the island. He would place the horses and the boat at your disposal. I beg you, have coffee with us this afternoon and read the contract which Andrees has drawn up. You will be contented with the post he wants to give you."

"The confounded contracts!"

"Well, I am glad you will consider it. If I may venture to tell you the truth, you are glad of this offer. You and Flackelholm belong to each other. You are rough and your bride is rough! You will wish to be buried on Flackelholm."

"Or somewhere in its Watts or waves."

"As God will. You will come then?"

"I will come to have coffee with your wife."

"I hope," said Heim, "that the three comrades will not only do honour to their names but that they may be good friends once more."

A week later Franz Strandiger went from Büsen to Flackelholm. The two boats met before Blauort. They shouted across a few brief sentences but could not hear what was said.

## CHAPTER X.

THE three comrades had arrived at the period when men give up trying to stand alone in the world, and come to some kind of peace with it. At this period a man places himself in some sort of relationship. He makes himself a citizen, a member of a fraternity, a fellow workman; one man chooses one way, another something else. One becomes a member of a famous skittle club, another becomes a worker in a really serious and important undertaking.

The three comrades had arrived at the time which decides whether a man is going to do something worth having in the second half of his life. What is the worth of gifts in youth? For many men they serve as a sort of feather bed on which a man reclines in luxurious idleness during the rest of his life. What is the worth of marriage? Many people get suspicious and cross. What is the worth of fiery, youthful enthusiasm? It may get a blue nose in the first keen wind. What is the worth of good resolutions? When the time comes to fulfil them they are forgotten. It is the years about thirty which decide.

Concerning the three comrades we may say that they promise well. They are all three modern men in the best sense of the term; they show the two strongly marked peculiarities of such men: they have the consciousness that they are worth something, and the conviction that they ought to help and advise and act.

Andrees is a Christian with strong and proved convictions. He has a powerful Master and a beautiful service. The Christian saying of the old heathen, "I am here not to hate but to love," that is acknowledged by him in his deepest soul. He is a very quiet man; he thinks over things for a long time, but he is entirely reliable. His friends count on his words, not because they are invariably right, but because they know they are the result of careful consideration. He would

not use the property of Maria Landt, either for himself or for Ingeborg, but when it was necessary to find some good employment for it, the two did not hesitate long. No one knew better than Andrees Strandiger what was the real need of the labourers in that district. They made out of the dead girl's property a "Maria Landt Bounty," convinced that they were acting as she would have desired. On the boundary of the Strandigerhof estate, near the Stülperkoog, and by the high-road, two small properties were created with the help of this money, and south of the wood, on the edge of Heim's heath, where the soil is good, five other small properties were made and sold to capable, young labourers. The financial arrangements of these little estates were made with the help of the Government Bank; the capital of the bounty is only used to make the beginning easier, and to help to pay the interest when it is heavy.

Andrees Strandiger has put all his zeal and all his knowledge into the management of his own estate. With the aid of the houses which he has built near the Hof, he has been able to provide himself with a number of the best labourers. The others come from the villages of the Geest and are capable, respectable men. The trouble which he sees round him and the discontent have caused him to devote all his energy, all his ardour and intelligence, to social studies. The confidence of his fellow parishioners has made him a magistrate, the confidence of the whole district put him at the head of various agricultural societies, then made him a member of the County Council and finally of the Board of Agriculture. Whatever he undertakes he works at with a thoroughness that is almost pedantic. Of course his sky is not wholly without a cloud. Where is the house that does not lack something? When he thinks of the past Frau Ingeborg finds it difficult to restore his spirits. Once, in the works of a great Socialist, he read that a man does well to be enthusiastic for a good cause in his youth, a cause that is struggling, so that in his old age he may have the pleasure of thinking that it has conquered by his help; then for several days he was discontented and depressed, for he thought of wasted years in his youth.

Franz Strandiger has already been living several years on Flackelholm. He has not very good health. His strength

used to be gigantic — now it is only ordinary, and he complains that his feet smart and swell when he has been walking five hours through the sand and mud. He remains an autocrat and cannot take a sympathetic attitude towards others; they are his labourers or they are people to whom he gives help and advice in the hope of receiving a proportionate return from them. But he has become juster and more reasonable. Since he experienced in his own person that he, the strong man, must have perished without the help of God and man he has become more gentle. He has a brave nature. His life is laborious, hard and lonely. It is not without dangers, and it may well be that he will find his end some day in the Watt or in the waves. He is considered to have a good knowledge of everything that has to do with the shore of the North Sea, and has all kinds of plans. The building of dykes, the gathering of sea moss, deep-sea fishing and the trade in fish — all these things continually occupy his mind. But when it was suggested that he should make Flackelholm a watering-place, then he laughed shortly as if at an idiotic idea. To politics — in the narrower sense of the word — he pays little attention; he troubles about nothing but his own affairs. In all matters that concern the shore he has won the confidence of the Government and seems to merit it more and more, and has some prospect of gaining the order which Heim once coveted. He takes great interest in colonizing — it is the only way in which he comes in contact with the great world. He knows several officers in the navy, who come from Kiel and who have made surveys on Flackelholm, and if he had children, boys like himself, he would expect them to become settlers in Southwest Africa or merchants in Kiautschow. Of course he, too, has not all he wants. Where is the human being without desires? His trouble is that he, Franz Strandiger, who was born to be master, will be all his life a steward and agent for some one else.

Heim Heiderieter has become a deacon in the church, and this makes people say that he is a head taller than all the previous Heiderieters. Never before was this office in the hands of a Heiderieter. They told him they could not make him the church architect. But that was not said to his disparagement; on the contrary, for they added: "You have not time enough to be church architect, Heim. For that one

ought to choose a man with a regular income and one who has sufficient gift of speech to keep the workmen from doing too much." The year before, in midsummer, Heim had experienced a piece of great good fortune. One afternoon, about four o'clock, he was standing at his front door in his shirt-sleeves and pretended to be looking at the sparrows which were sporting on the school playground, the children being away for their summer holidays. In reality he was waiting for the postman who had just disappeared in the schoolhouse. It is no light matter when a man is so full of hope and yet so tortured by doubt, when an author so completely wanting in self-confidence has sent his first important manuscript on its travels.

The school door opened. Heim looked towards the sparrows and saw that the postman was coming towards him, but did not see that Haller stood in the school door.

A letter! A letter from the Berlin publishing house! Not the manuscript!

The envelope was torn into scraps. "What does it say?"

"What? Fifteen hundred marks? If you will accept?"

"Eva! Eva! Come here! Eva Heiderieter, where are you?"

Neighbour Haller — who in spite of his weight took long, light steps — hastened across the road; the tails of his coat, which could not keep pace with him, floating slowly behind.

In the passage Heim had embraced his Eva.

"Fifteen hundred marks! Say something! Say something! What shall we do now? Build a new house! The boy shall have new shoes. Jürgen! harness the horses! You shall have a good cloth dress!" He let her go and ran up and down, shaking his head all the time and stamping his foot in the passage. His eyes were bright.

Then the visitor in the door could hold out no longer. "Heim, my boy."

"What do you say, neighbour?" and he took the old man by both arms, and all at once, when he saw the old face, he cried out: "If Frisius could have lived to see it."

"If he had lived to see it," said Haller, "then he would have raised his forefinger as he used to" — and he held his finger up stiffly in the air — "and would have said: 'Haller! After all we are not sure you are right. The Heiderieters

are a fine but lazy race. I am only afraid he may get lazy now,"

Heim laughed.

Eva ran into the kitchen. Two little Heiderieters were standing by the trough for the calves; the four-year-old boy was trying to feed his little brother with the big spoon, which was full of bran, and the other was opening his mouth. She knelt down by the children, wiped the little one's mouth with her apron and thought: "Fifteen hundred marks! How useful it will be! Fifteen hundred! Andrees can have back the two hundred he lent us and we can buy a new cart and cultivate four acres more, and keep the two yearlings and mend the western wall, and buy shirts for the little ones and a dress for mother. I think I am going too far. We will leave out mother's dress. How happy he is! As happy as a child! Now he will get more confidence — but he sha'n't be proud." She sat for some time bending down by the hearth; the firelight fell on her dark plaits, and her hands were folded. "Life is full of trouble but full of blessings too. I was deceived in him; he looked so strong that time in Heidelberg — but he is weak. Still his intentions are good and his love is true. I am thankful for it with my whole heart."

"Do you know, mamma," said the little one, "the song the swallows sing? I have learnt it now. They sit on the barn door and sing. Only listen —

"' And now the little swallow  
To her husband said:  
" My Heine, my Heine, my Heine,  
The time has sped;  
In your little nest,  
With your tiny breast  
On the down at rest,  
Who will give you bread?'"

"' Now to his little wife  
Little Heine cries:  
" My Liese, my Liese, my Liese,  
Clear are the skies.  
The sun is here,  
And the air is clear,  
We must have no fear,  
There are many flies."

“Now they sing together,  
 Those little ones away:  
 “My Liese, my Heine, my Liese,  
 Te-tril, bi-dei.  
 For men feel sorrow,  
 And say to-morrow;  
 We sing to-day,  
 And are glad alway.  
 Now we will fly: Juckhei! ” ” ”

Then Heim came into the kitchen, and when he saw her bending down, and caught sight of her quiet face, he knew what she was feeling. He lifted her up to him and said —

“Eva, you shall always get happier and happier.”

“I am happy, Heim. I have always been happy since I was your wife. You love me, and we have enough to eat and we have the dear children.”

Then they sat together by the hearth. The fire flickered over them, and their faces shone in the light and they made plans.

That day brought yet another surprise. After Heim had quieted down, and Eva gone to the stable to milk the cow, the front door sounded and some one came down the passage in slippers. Heim went towards the glass door, not expecting anything unusual, and vexed by the disturbance because his mind had been filled with beautiful images. Then, when his hand was on the door, he saw standing there, drawn up to her full height, a white, neatly folded handkerchief in her stiff fingers, with her accustomed heavy shawl round her — the widow Thiel.

“Mother Thiel! No! Mother Thiel!”

“Let me sit down first,” she said. “It is no trifle for an old woman like I am, such a long journey.”

“In leather slippers.”

“They came from Schuster Ketel’s. And I tell you they have not been wet once.”

“But why have you come back, Mother Thiel?”

“Why? You think I couldn’t find my way back because you had taken me in so, do you remember, with that peat basket! What did you mean by talking like that to an old woman?”

“Yes, Mother Thiel, but why have you come back here?”

"Why? Do you think I was going to let them keep the money I get for Heinrich and from the insurance?"

"Didn't they send it after you?"

"Sometimes! But often it did not come, and when it came the girls always said they needed money just then."

"But tell me, Mother Thiel, weren't you better off with your children? Aren't you quite deserted and alone here?"

The old woman leaned her strong hands on her knee and said, with a stern face —

"My children were very glad, Heim, and the grandchildren too. Those in Australia were glad in English, for they didn't know a word of German. But whenever I had just sat down it was: 'Mother, will you do this? Mother, you can help me now.' Often they said: 'Mother, just take hold of the child for a minute,' and then I would have the little wriggling thing in my arms. And I am not used to that, Heim. When I had little children of my own I could take hold of them fast enough; but now I can't do it any longer. I am glad that I have seen them again, but I didn't want anything more."

She rose with difficulty — for she had grown older — and went towards the passage. At the front door she turned round again and said —

"I have been to the parish officer already about the money. He said: 'It will be paid without delay.' He said that, Heim, 'paid without delay.' He is a capable man, Heim."

On the Sandway she turned round again. "Give my love to your wife. Are the cows on the meadow this year? Have you good milk? Well — I nearly forgot why I came to you. Tell Eva to keep half a pint for me every evening."

Pellwormer, who was struggling with an invalided clock which some one had sent into his house for repairs, said nothing when she appeared suddenly in the door. She touched him on the shoulder.

"For the first half-hour you will be absolutely silent, I know, then it will be better." She began to light the fire, which had gone out, and prepare the coffee in her old way.

It is difficult to say much of Heiderieter as an author. It would be foolish to give a definite judgment, for he is still developing. We will only remark here that he has planned to write a romance on each of the chief periods of the history

of Schleswig-Holstein, and that the first of these romances, which deals with the twelfth century, has already appeared. For the rest, we have said so much of Heim Heiderieter in these pages that every one who has read them attentively will be able to imagine for himself Heiderieter as a writer.

This is the truth about the three comrades. They have not gained the laurel, or the sack of gold, or the order. Life has given a burden to each of them, but they are not peevish and distrustful, as so many are. They do not stand idle and let others think and act, as so many do. They never take things from people and give nothing in return, as so many do. They don't quarrel with the Government, as many do, but they work with the Government and with the people.

The relations of the three comrades among themselves left much to be desired for a number of years. Andrees and Heim did not often see the master of Flackelholm. He did not enter the Strandigerhof, though he saw Ingeborg once or twice when they met accidentally in the town. Yet they gradually drew closer. A journey which Heim suggested was very useful in this respect. He asked the two others to go to Kiel with him, for he wished to gain access to a manuscript in the university library. Andrees had business in Hamburg, so he decided to go out of his way to this town, and if possible to see old Bismarck in Friedrichsruhe. Andrees went to Kiel all the more gladly because he intended to meet some political friends there. The women were to travel with them. After some consideration Franz said that he would go up the Elbe in his yacht and meet the others in Hamburg.

The whole journey went exactly as they wished, though Franz, especially in Ingeborg's presence, showed a good deal of constraint. In Hamburg Franz conducted them to see the splendid new harbour, and they had the loveliest weather. It was like a glimpse into the wide world in which the nations had become peaceful merchants. In Friedrichsruhe they had the pleasure not only of seeing the prince, but of speaking to him. When he was driving along the hollow road which leads into the wood on the other side of the railway, he seemed to be pleased by the three strong, vigorous men, with the two stately women beside them. The carriage stopped, and he asked them where they had come from and where they were going to. Then at last he asked: "Are you still in

the Landwehr?" Heim drew himself up, and said with meaning: "As long as we live, your highness!" Then the old man nodded, looked at them with his powerful eyes, and went on.

In Kiel the two women were invited to visit some acquaintances; the men went each his own way, and the directions in which their steps turned were characteristic of them. Andrees attended a large popular meeting, where the workmen were asked to give up their fruitless opposition to the Government and, like their comrades in England, to work with it, and have courage and confidence in the development of the country. Later on, when he was sitting with the speakers of the evening, and some other political friends, they asked if he would think of standing as candidate for his own district in the Reichstag, as the seat was vacant just then. We may be sure that he approaches this task with a heavy heart, but he will not disappoint the wish of his friends and the confidence of many far-seeing men.

The same evening Franz spent several pleasant hours in the company of some naval officers with whom he was acquainted, and who received the King of Flackelholm with great delight. At the conclusion of the meeting they entreated him to marry as soon as possible; if he himself would not be a colonist, it was his duty to take care that he should have boys to follow in their path. He passed over the remark laughingly, but his laugh was happier than it had been for long.

Heim sat in the cheerful study of a professor who was a distinguished man and a specialist in the history of Schleswig-Holstein, and who had from the beginning taken a keen interest in Heim's work.

In a happy mood, and feeling that the journey had brought them closer together, the five returned home.

A few days later, at the beginning of September, Franz Strandiger was standing on the highest sand-hill in Flackelholm; he had a gun over his shoulder, and held in his hand some ducks he had just shot. He was looking across towards Büsen, whose houses could be seen plainly in the clear sunshine. He stood there stately and proud, looking as if he were made to rule; his glance was keen and swift, but his eyes had grown more peaceful and there was something tranquil

and thoughtful in his whole appearance. The change had been brought about by that day when he had suffered shipwreck more than once, by the great impressive loneliness of his island and by the hard work he had done upon it.

The field on the island was traversed by natural water-courses and by channels that had been artificially made; far out, as far as there was a glimmer of green grass, there stretched trenches and earth walls, and still farther, hundreds of yards into the Watt, were built strong dams of brushwood which stretched out their arms to hold firm the mud already there, and to capture that washed about by the tide. The long chain of dunes which was the bulwark of the island had been enclosed by a wire fence so that no animal could get on them to eat the grass or trample down the walls which arrested the blowing sand. On the field, between the trenches, which were crossed by wooden bridges here and there, there fed six hundred sheep, over a thousand geese, ten young cattle, some cows, and two strong horses. Below, at the foot of the dyke, little children were sailing boats in the channel; they were the children of the shepherd and the labourer, who lived in the neat stone house. The red-headed man had built his little summer-house of stranded wood in the west of the island, at the very end of the dunes; his boat lay in the Dieksander Gatt.

All this had been made in four summers, toiled at in four lonely winters, guarded and strengthened and improved, though it was surrounded by the stormy sea. Franz Strandiger had always done his utmost; before, he had tried to seize his heart's desire; now he seized on his work, his serious and important plans. He had not changed his nature; it was only that he had changed his goal, but because of that people thought him quite different.

From Büsen came a light sailing boat. Its new sail lay slantingly on the water and it sailed well.

He saw it at once.

"That's right, they are coming. They will land in another hour."

He took his time, went over the dyke, gave up the ducks to Antje, who stood by the hearth, and told her to roast them.

"Guests are coming, Antje! Do you remember the people who visited Büsen last summer and sailed out four times to visit us?"

"The young lady from Hamburg who liked Flackelholm so much?"

"Yes, she. I saw her again in Hamburg a fortnight ago. But this time she is bringing her father with her."

"Well," said Antje shortly, "then I know already."

"What do you know?"

"Don't make any pretence. You mean to take a wife."

"But you must stay here, Antje, in any case."

"Well, I would with her. She is simple and she says her parents are plain people."

He laughed his short laugh and went out. When he crossed the summit of the dyke they had already landed. Yes, they were both coming: the fair girl, a true Frisian figure, tall and slender, and beside her her father in his sailor's cap and suit, not any taller than his daughter, though he was by no means a small man. Franz Strandiger went quickly to meet them; from the distance the old man made a sign to him somewhat shyly and called out gaily —

"King of Flackelholm, I salute you! Well, you won't take it badly from an old sailor."

They shook hands and understood each other at once.

"How does the new boat behave, Fräulein Elsa?"

She did not answer his question but said, looking up at him —

"You did not come ashore the whole winter."

He shook his head.

"But this summer," she said, "many visitors will come across to see the King of Flackelholm. I know that — I know that — these people come from far inland; they have never seen a real wave and they are wild about every one who wears a sailor's cap."

He laughed.

"But you, Fräulein Elsa, you know I am a very ordinary sort of man, even somewhat cowardly."

"How do you mean?"

"I shall feel so if you inspect Flackelholm to-day and everything on it."

She grew shy.

"I will only inspect you," she said frankly. "I want to know if you mean well. Surely that is not wrong."

He turned to her eagerly and shook her hand vigorously.

"No, Fräulein Elsa, it is not wrong, but very few people care to know anything about me."

She looked up at him quickly and her whole face beamed with pleasure.

They came to the dyke and went up. Elsa went to speak to Antje, but the captain remained standing on the summit, wiped the sweat from his brow, looked all round and said —

"This last winter Elsa talked a great deal of you and your island, Herr Strandiger. Elsa — you must know — was born somewhere on the high sea, not far from New Zealand. At that time I was captain of an Apenrader boat that went from San Francisco to Melbourne. I belong by birth to Sylt, but I have Apenrader blood as well. They are both vigorous people. That is how she gets her blue eyes and her height. She came with us for a long time. Now she feels it too shut in here in Hamburg; she likes wide spaces. I had that boat built and we came down the Elbe; we almost came to grief in that confounded Süderpiep, for we were both looking towards Flackelholm and the flagstaff which showed over the dyke. My sons are all well provided for: two are captains and two are merchants, one in the Transvaal and one in China. I have only one girl, but she gives me more anxiety than all the four boys."

"She must marry, captain."

"Must she? Well now, tell me about this place. The island belongs to your cousin? What is its value?"

"That is difficult to say, and besides, the land is increasing."

"You have made a legal contract with your cousin?"

"Yes, I am a kind of plenipotentiary, and I am allowed a free hand. It is a valuable possession. More than thirty thousand marks have been spent here in building and making dykes; the flocks are worth above twenty thousand marks, and we spend up there where the land is increasing — do you see the new straight trenches? — we spend three thousand marks there every year."

"You don't mean it!" He turned to Strandiger with a quick movement. "But do you hear, you ought to have a rich wife?"

Strandiger had to laugh; the old man showed so plainly his confusion and distress.

"No," he answered. "Not a rich wife, but a wife who

has some spirit and who likes Flackelholm. Do you see?" he said. "Büsen lies there. The old sailors who spend the whole day on the shore understand my code of signals, but it is a long time before they can come if we have trouble or sickness here. It is no easy thing for a young woman to live on Flackelholm. And in winter—"

"In winter? I thought you only lived here in the summer."

Strandiger shook his head.

"I have lived here four years and seen no faces but those of my people. It is true we may be able for the future to spend two or three of the winter months in Büsen, for I know now quite well enough what Flackelholm is like in winter. But for the rest—I can manage here, and I don't desire a better place to live in. I always wanted a wide kingdom for myself and I have got it, but a woman needs to consider carefully."

Elsa came up the dyke and advanced towards them.

Strandiger continued: "I know one must have consideration for a woman; but I could not bear it if she were unhappy or cried, or wanted to go back to the mainland. I shall stay all my life on Flackelholm, that is why I say she must be strong in body and soul. If she is, life here is not without worth and joy. Do you see, captain, that level space of land there on the horizon? You can get across from here at the ebb-tide, either by walking or riding or driving. At a pinch, and if the horses are good, you can go and return at the same ebb. The land is increasing on both sides, and there is deep, soft mud the whole way between. The Government are working there actively and intelligently, and we are working here. Between us there are many thousand acres of the finest land still under water. But that is what we need—land. Up there on the dykes the houses are full of children. If I live and keep my strength—I shall not see it completed, for a human life is not long enough—but after me, and not too long after me either people will see one wheat-field after another and one farm after another, and every Sunday morning the inhabitants of this ring dyke will go along a white road to church, towards the town which you see there; then, when that has come to pass, the children will still talk of the King of Flackelholm who began the work."

The captain looked thoughtful and nodded his iron-grey head.

"It is a good work," he said gravely, "and I can understand my daughter; and I wish you good fortune in everything — your whole life." He put on his cap again and said: "I will look at the house with your permission and give myself up to your housekeeper. I am tired." He went down the dyke to the house, and soon stood talking eagerly to Antje by the fire where the ducks were roasting.

"And we?" said Franz Strandiger.

"If you like we will go towards the dunes and sit on the seat where we sat last summer, and talk a little."

But they did not get so far; something very small and slight interrupted them.

When they were going together through the long grass at the foot of the dunes, both deeply moved, they perceived a lark on its tiny nest between the stalks of grass. It did not fly out, but sat craning its neck forward and looking at them. Its mate was close by.

They both stood still. The tiny, pretty picture drew them together. The man thought: "That is nature." The girl thought: "O how sweet and tender," and hung her head.

He could no longer keep quiet with her so close to him. His old impetuosity came over him and he drew her to him. She repressed her tears.

"Yes, I consent. But you must love me. I will be very, very happy."

The larks did not move, but watched them.

Next evening Heim and Eva took the news of the Flackelholm betrothal, which Antje had brought them, across to the Strandigerhof.

The blind lady was sitting up as usual in her white bed. Heim sat on the edge of the bed and told her about the betrothal in really exuberant gladness. She cried with joy, but when he stroked her soft hands and told her to laugh, she smiled. Then, when they were sitting together in the parlour next to her bedroom, Andrees drew out a letter.

"I also have got something," he said. "A letter from Hinnerk Elsen. Listen."

"DEAR HERR STRANDIGER:—I have received the letter which Heim wrote to me. I am glad that the new houses are built and that there is land with them, and that Pell-wormer is still alive, though somewhat stiff and feeble. We get on well here; we have land and food, though not much money; Schütt is the most fortunate of all. This is what has happened. When he went away he thanked God and said that Eschenwinkel and the whole of Schleswig-Holstein might be drowned in the sea, and he would not care. He was always so reckless in what he said. He was like that all the journey, and for the first six months after we arrived. Then he could not be contented any longer on the land he had rented. He began to go round the farms as a pedlar, and since he is a lively talker the people bought his things, especially the English, for he was always railing at Germany. He told them often enough what it was like at home: heath, pond, dyke, crooked roads, village and church, and he said, 'You see, it is a crooked land! But here in Iowa everything is at right angles.' That is what he said. He had learnt a lot at school. But the truth came out in the end. Once he had got drunk and was railing at Schleswig-Holstein. Then the Englishman began to sing a mocking song about the Germans. All at once he began to cry and strike out and shout, 'You shall not say anything against Schleswig-Holstein. It is the best country in the whole world.' And he began to talk about it—the heath and the dyke and the Wehl. He got quite beside himself with homesickness. He is like that still. He does his work well and keeps sober, but in the evening he sits before his house and makes a little dyke, and the border of the heath, and the church and the village, all out of earth and little stones. And he has made it so well that on Sundays we all go across and stand there to look at it. And then he goes on talking about the old crooked land. He seems to think he can never come back, and he behaves as if it were in the moon, but he gets on very well. So do we, and Anna sends her love; she makes a splendid wife. Indian corn costs nothing, pigs four dollars. We have killed them ourselves.

"HINNERK ELSEN, farmer."

From the old mother's bedroom came a child's low cry. Ingeborg got up and went into the room, took up her child

and sat down by the old lady's bed. She was still sitting up, and in a quiet voice Ingeborg told her about the letter.

"It is a good thing, mother," she said gently, "that they get on so well there. It does Andrees good to hear it. He is always so sad about them."

The old woman nodded. "And everything has turned to good — excepting Maria's grave. They all three live at home, not far from each other. Andrees and Heim, and Franz at Flackelholm. Who would have thought it?"

Ingeborg bent her fair head over the bright hair of the child on her breast.

"Yes," she said softly, "it is beautiful at home."

A sucking noise sounded in the room.

"What are you doing, Ingeborg?"

"I am feeding the child."

The blind woman nodded. "I have done it in the very same place where you are doing it now."

That night, in the little house in Eschenwinkel, the last which is still standing, Pellwormer lay dying. The widow Thiel sat by his bed, Antje at the table; she had put on her spectacles — she had to wear spectacles now — and was reading "Jesus, my refuge," and the hymn which the great Klopstock sang: "Thou shalt arise, thou shalt arise!"

When the dawn crossed the heath with its soft footsteps and looked in at the small low window, the old man begged that they would turn his head towards it. He lay in that position a long time. His lips moved; Antje and the widow Thiel knew what his soul was singing.

"The clock has struck four,  
It is four by the clock,  
The day drives away the dark night,  
Dear Christians, awake and be bright,  
And praise God the Lord."

THE END.